Football Premiership: Southampton 1 Liverpool 2

Owen gives Reds the perfect start

David Lacey

JOINT management would appear to suit Liverpool, judging from last Sunday's result at the Dell. Then again it was their fourth win at Southampton in five visits; more a case, perhaps, of horses for courses than two heads being better than one.

In fact from a practical point of view Liverpool owed their victory less to Gérard Houllier's appointment as an extra pair of hands to work with Roy Evans than Southampton's loss of a defender at a crucial moment late in the game.

In the 74th minute Jason Dodd, their captain and right-back, had been hurt helping to break up a Liverpool attack and went behind the goal to finish receiving treatment. In the meantime Liverpool won a throw-in on the left.

Dodd tried to re-enter the field before it was taken but was waved back by the referee, Paul Alcock, and remained a frustrated spectator as Paul Ince headed on Steve Staunton's long throw. Paul Jones could only palm Ince's effort down for Michael Owen to score one of his simplest goals. The referee was correct but it was still a hard way for Southampton to lose.

Although Liverpool generally passed the ball more imaginatively and at times looked like winning the game through their consistent width and attacking mobility, the amount of effort Southampton put into the game should have earned them a point. They still have not won on the opening day since the 1988-89 season, but on this occasion they did not really deserve to lose.

Liverpool's was a mixed performance. The arrival of Houllier has coincided with an even more positive approach, to judge from the initial line-up, which had Ince, Jason McAteer, Steve McManaman and Patrick Berger frequently pushing forward to support Owen and Karlheinz Riedle.

They also look stronger on the flanks now that Staunton has been brought back to Anfield after a seven-year absence. The threat of Staunton on the left was complemented by the attacking inclinations on the right of Vegard Heggem, who increasingly turned Southampton's defence the longer the match progressed.

When Southampton took the lead in the 36th minute, however, the goal followed one of Stuart Ripley's crosses from the right. After taking a ricochet off Staunton the ball looped into the middle where Egil Ostenstad's head glanced it down into the far corner of the net, touching Ince on the way.

The swiftness of Liverpool's response was encouraging for those who feel this may be Anfield's season to make a serious title challenge. Within two minutes McAteer had found Owen on the left, and from the teenager's cross the timing of Riedle's leap left Richard Dryden earthbound as the German nodded the equaliser.

Dave Jones had pointedly started the game with Matthew Le Tissier on the bench, and afterwards the manager said he would be willing to listen to offers for the player. For more than an hour it appeared that Le Tissier would miss the whole game. When he did replace Ostenstad for the last 23 minutes it was to little immediate effect, partly because he was pushed up alongside Hughes, which is hardly his natural role.

Nevertheless he might have saved the match for Southampton at the last when the Liverpool defence allowed a dropping ball to reach him in the penalty area, only for him to drag his shot wide.

Liverpool's managers afterwards beamed twin smiles, with Evans stressing the importance of character and Houllier talking about the desire to win.



Pivotal role: Ince congratulates Owen on his goal PHOTO: GRAHAM CHADWICK

Motor Racing

Schumacher stops thrice to conquer

Alan Henry in Budapest

MICHAEL Schumacher's fifth victory of the season owed as much to quick thinking by the Ferrari team as to quick driving by the German in the Hungarian Grand Prix on a twisty circuit where the lack of overtaking opportunities meant making the most of a clever refuelling strategy.

Ferrari correctly judged that a three-stop strategy running on the harder of Goodyear's two available tyre compounds would be the quickest route to complete the gruelling 77-lap race. This proved accurate and, when Schumacher emerged from his third pit visit five seconds ahead of David Coulthard's McLaren-Mercedes, he was able to cruise to victory ahead of the Scot.

"It was very much a race run at qualifying speed throughout for me," said Schumacher, whose team did not make the decision to change from a two-stop strategy until he had refuelled for the first time on lap 25.

Schumacher's only slip came when he slid on the grass at the last corner on lap 52 but he recovered with such aplomb that the excursion barely registered on the timing screens.

Coulthard, who had run second in the opening stages, was clearly disappointed that he had not been able to get on terms with Schumacher after his McLaren team-mate Mika Hakkinen faded because of handling problems. "Based on our tests last week in Jerez we were confident that the tyre we were to use in qualifying would also be quick in the race," he said. "But we seemed to hit a bit of a brick wall in terms of performance when I didn't seem to be able to go as quick after my second stop as before."

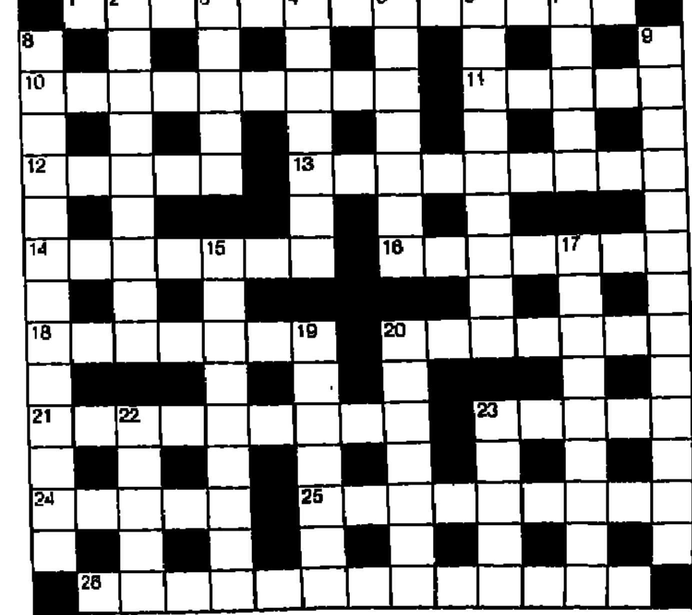
Schumacher's win narrowed Hakkinen's world championship lead from 16 to seven points, with four races left and 40 points to race for. This dramatic reversal in fortunes came as the Finn was poised to take the title beyond the reach of his German rival.

Hakkinen qualified superbly on pole for the eighth time this season, but dire handling problems blunted his pace midway through the race, leaving Coulthard to take up the chase of Schumacher.

Subsequent examination of Hakkinen's McLaren indicated that the problem was probably a broken shock absorber in the front suspension, rendering the car virtually undriveable as he slipped back to sixth place behind Villeneuve, Damon Hill's Jordan-Mugen-Honda and the Williams of Heinz-Harald Frentzen, who had been suffering from gastric flu for much of the weekend.

Hill was delighted to have finished fourth in his second consecutive grand prix. "If we keep this up we will eventually end up on the podium," he said.

Cryptic crossword by Araucaria



Across

1 Topsy-turvy, arsy-versy legend in pub and hospital? (6,7)
10 Great king and queen follow a classical law (9)
11 River to enter hole and divide (5)
12 Look! Feet — yards — high! (5)
13 Cook fowls and dine where it's always cold (9)
14 Much love of money among Poles produces cooked lamb (7)
16 Cocktail takes little time and lot of noise (7)
18 Pub drink reported: that's no way to trade! (7)
20 Muslim hesitantly acquiring more cheerful disposition? (7)
21 Fish and fruit only (5-4)
23 Dog's eaten nothing for tea (5)
24 What the foreman says hasn't caught the composer (5)
25 Supplying food to let animal develop (9)
26 Decision after all not to kill retreating enemy — he's in transport (6,2,5)

Down

2 Having finished a game they should go to school (4,5)
3 Creep into a dying mood (5)
4 Crazy individual takes issue with US president (7)
5 Do fix your hair for making an entrance (7)
6 Master criminal wants holiday — France? (4,5)
7 Lament for something terrible outside Gateshead (5)
8 Villain of glen suffers 26 . . . (7,2,4)
9 . . . if extreme, 1 (4,4,5)
15 Make a new picture and put in name for merchantman (3,6)
17 Con man could be a cert with a skirt (9)
19 Underground development is excessively promoted in fashion (7)
20 Lawman's wine sounds very loud (7)
22 Laughter should tidy up the hospital (5)
23 Set of rules for church made by bishop, for example (5)

Last week's solution

A	N	D	R	E	W	C	A	R	N	E	G	I	E	
L		E		T		H		E		P		T		B
P	A	R	T	H	I	A	N	S		S	H	E	B	A
E		V		E		N		I		O		R		R
S	T	I	L	L		D	I	S	E	M	B	A	R	K
M		S		B		L		T				T		I
A	T	H	L	E	T	E	S		S	C	R	E	W	S
R				R		R		D		A				I
I	N	M	A	T	E		P	E	R	T	A	I	N	S
T		A				C		M		H		S		W
I	N	R	E	V	E	R	S	E		A	G	A	M	I
M		T		E		A		R		R		D		L
E	L	I	O	T		T	O	A	D	S	T	O	O	L
S		N		C		E		R		I		R		I
	F	I	S	H	E	R	M	A	N	S	Y	A	R	N

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP:
Arsenal 2, Nottingham Forest 1; Blackburn Rovers 0, Derby County 0; Coventry City 2, Chelsea 1; Everton 0, Aston Villa 0; Manchester United 2, Leicester City 2; Middlesbro 0, Leeds United 0, Newcastle United 0, Charlton 0, Sheff Wednesday 0, West Ham United 1; Southampton 1, Liverpool 2; Wimbledon 3, Tottenham 1.

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE:
Division One:
Birmingham 3, Crystal Palace 1; Oxford Utd 0, Wolves 2; QPR 1, Bristol City 1; Stockport 0, Norwich 2; Swindon 1, Sunderland 1; Tranmere 1, Portsmouth 1; Watford 1, Bradford C 0; West Brom 4, Sheff Utd 1.

Division Two:
Blackpool 3, Oldham 0; Bristol Rvrs 4, Reading 1, Chesterfld 1, Burnley 0; Lincoln 1, Wigan 0; Luton 1, Preston 1; Millwall 2, Wycombe 1; Notts Co 1, Bournemouth 2, Stoke 2, Macclesfield 0; Walsall 0, Northampton 0; Wrexham 2, Colchester 4; York City 1, Gillingham 1.

Division Three:
Barnet 0, Hartlepool 2; Brighton 2, Chester 2; Camb U 2, Swansea 2; Cardiff 1, Peterborough 3; Exeter 1, Scarborough 0; Halifax 1, Brentford 0; Hull 1, Darlington 2; L Orient 1, Rotherham 4; Mansfield 2, Plymouth 0; Rochdale 0, Torquay 2; Scunthorpe 3, Carlisle Utd 1; Southend 2, Shrewsbury 1.

SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier League:
Aberdeen 3, Celtic 2; Dundee Utd 0, Hearts 0; Dunfrmln 2, Dundee 0; Rangers 2, Motherwell 1, St Johnstn 0, Kilmarnock 0.

First Division:
Ayr 1, Gr Morton 0; Clydebank 0, Falkirk 1; Hamilton 1, Airdrie 1; Hibernian 1, Stranraer 2; St Mirren 2, Raith 1.

Second Division:
East Fife 2, Alloa 2; Forfar 0, Partick 1; Inverness CT 2, Livingston 1; Queen Sth 0, Arbroath 0; Stirling 1, Clyde 2.

Third Division:
Albion 0, Ross County 8; E Stirling 1, Brechin 1; Montrose 1, Berwick 1; Queen's Pk 0, Dumbarton 1; Stenhousemuir 1, Cowdenbeath 2.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

US declares war on terrorism

THE United States last week launched two sudden and simultaneous cruise missile attacks against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, an opening salvo in what President Bill Clinton called a long war against terrorism.

"Our target was terror. Our mission was clear," he said from the Oval Office. "The countries that persistently host terrorism have no right to be safe havens."

Between 75 and 100 Tomahawk missiles were fired from six US warships and a submarine at training camps in Afghanistan controlled by the Saudi-born millionaire Osama bin Laden, and at a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The raids were in retaliation for the recent bombing of US embassies in East Africa, which killed at least 263 people, among them 12 Americans.

The US won unqualified support from Britain's Tony Blair, but the Arab world erupted in fury, and Sudan denied that chemical weapons were being made at the Khartoum factory destroyed in the attack.

Missiles expose Clinton's failings

COMMENT
Martin Woollacott

THE slow shipwreck of the Clinton presidency began during his first term. In domestic and foreign policy alike, a characteristic pattern emerged, combining a readiness to retreat under pressure with an excessively obedient attention to public opinion. In spite of undeniable achievements, it has been a presidency of the easy way out, proceeding by a series of short-term solutions to the problems of the week, the day and even the hour. But what makes a president look good on a Monday may make him look bad by Friday, and a fool, or worse, half a year later.

The events of the past week, the public confession and the missile attacks, are related because both spring from this same pattern of behaviour. The double crisis of Clinton's life as a private person and his life as the chief executive of the United States arise from a habit of decision-making fixated on immediate advantage and on the postponement of hard choices, a fixation that demoted all other considerations, including telling the truth.

Clinton is right to argue that the new office of Special Prosecutor is too powerful, too intrusive, and too open to partisan manipulation. Yet the most important truth about Clinton is that he has displayed the identical faults in the Monica Lewinsky affair as he often has in matters of public policy. Prevarication, procrastination and a failure to think things through — a schoolmaster's list of schoolboy vices, of which few are entirely free. But, in a president, they can have global consequences.

What the US ought now to be considering, along with the rest of us, is the broad failure of foreign policy and international management that the state of the world now reveals. To load on the shoulders of Clinton alone, or on the US government alone, the responsibility for what has gone wrong in Russia, in Asia, in the Indian subcontinent, in the Balkans, or in the Middle East would be to exaggerate the extent to which humanity, even American humanity, is in control of its affairs. But a more consistent, more reflective and tougher president than Clinton has been would undoubtedly have made a difference.

For all his undoubted intelligence and contacts with academics and intellectuals, Clinton has been ruled by conventional and often shallow ideas in foreign policy. Even on these terms he has subverted his own purposes by his preoccupation with day-to-day popularity.

Clinton could have been the Western leader who spotted how cumulatively disastrous was the impact on Russia of the economic changes urged by the West. He could have been the leader who saw that there were more problems to the Asian economic miracle than that of trying to secure as large a piece of the trade action for the US as possible. He might, if he had had more success in disarmament, have headed off India's and Pakistan's testing of nuclear weapons. He could also have been the president who used the US's once large capital of influence in the Middle East to push through a peace settlement between Israelis and the Palestinians, instead of letting Binyamin Netanyahu's obstructionism prevail.

The bombings of the the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam did not come out of nowhere. Terrorism is not a fixed, demonic force that always exists and always strives to do evil, which is how it so often figures in political rhetoric and how it figured in Clinton's explanation of the missile attacks. Men seeking change by violent means respond to the coherence of the policies of the governments they oppose. They retreat, they change, they accommodate themselves to success, even to the point of embracing peaceful means. That, we hope, is the story of Northern Ireland.

Equally, they respond to weakness, lack of coherence, the sense that there is no plan or goal. It is unprovable, but it seems unlikely that the East African attacks would have taken place had there been the sort of new dispensation in the Middle East that seemed possible in the aftermath of the Gulf war. Even without a Middle East peace, the attacks may not have taken place had Clinton not seemed, in mid-1998, an irrevocably weakened president.

What the president has now done could make things worse. Revenge is not policy. Did the word go out from Martha's Vineyard to obliterate camps in Khost and a factory in Khartoum because the US genuinely believed this to be the best way to prevent new terrorist attacks? Or did it go out because those insidious little polls that guide the US government showed citizens would relish quick retaliation?

Crossing international frontiers unilaterally to inflict punishment should not be done lightly, especially at a time when the US does not have the standing it once had. If it can be justified, as it has been in Iraq or in former Yugoslavia, these are exceptions that prove the rule.

The US attacks, assuming they were aimed at the right targets, will not remove the capacity for fresh outrages against US or other Western installations and people. They could signal the resumption of a war that had been in remission, involving a sequence of such outrages and responses that will serve no rational purpose. Indeed, as in the past with Ronald Reagan, such a confrontation could take the place of genuinely flexible policy-making and further polarise the Middle East.

As US commentators were pointing out before the news of the missile attacks, it matters less whether any particular show of strength by the US is or is not a device to distract attention from the president's problems at home than that it will inevitably be seen as such.

Even if his relations with Lewinsky had remained, as they should have, a personal matter between the few people directly affected, he was already a leader who had disappointed. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that he had already failed to be the leader who could transcend the West's parochialism, who could go beyond easy formulas about peace, democracy, economic growth, and fight against, rather than go along with, the tendency to see policy as a commodity devised to gratify the public rather than an instrument to serve it.

Khartoum fury, page 6
Comment, page 12
Washington Post, page 15



Meeting fire with fire . . . Protesters in Karachi burn the Stars and Stripes at a rally to condemn the US attacks PHOTOGRAPH: AAMIR QURESHI

Markets hit by growing global crisis

Mark Milner and Mark Atkinson

WALL STREET experienced a roller-coaster ride on Monday as markets reacted to the political turmoil in Russia and concern that Latin America could become the next victim of the deepening global crisis. In late trading on Monday, however, the Dow Jones pulled back, closing at 8566.61, up 32.96.

Analysts said President Boris Yeltsin's decision to recall former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin *(see story, page 3)* offered reassurance to investors that Russia could get to grips with its financial crisis. But the underlying mood was one of extreme nervousness.

"The big picture is still negative. Everywhere you turn the news is bad news," said David Coleman, economist at CIBC Wood Gundy.

As well as worries about the losses incurred by Western, especially German, banks in Russia, where the government has imposed a moratorium on debt repayments, sentiment continued to be weighed down by the possibility of financial contagion spreading to other ...

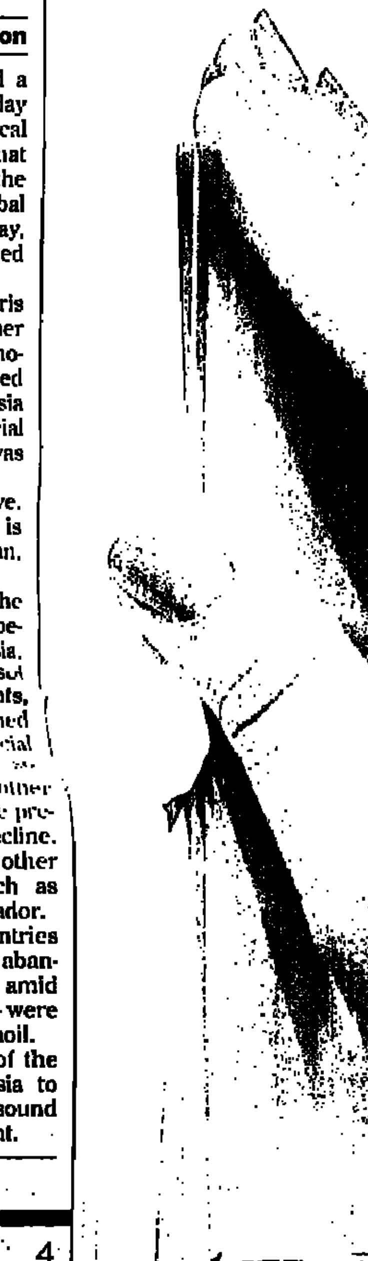
Brazil's stock market fell another 3 per cent on Monday after the previous Friday's 10 per cent decline. Investors cautiously eyed other Latin American markets such as Venezuela, Argentina and Ecuador.

Even basically healthy countries such as Norway — forced to abandon the defence of the krone amid intense speculative pressure — were dragged into the financial turmoil.

Austria, current president of the European Union, urged Russia to agree legislation to ensure a sound budget and to revive investment.

Martin Walker, page 6

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80



Double standards lie on the road to resentment

THE appalling outrage in the double bombing of United States embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam deserves universal condemnation, as did the earlier incidents in Saudi Arabia, Lockerbie and Beirut in which US citizens were targeted (US puts $2 million bounty on bombers, August 16).

Such actions, regrettably, are likely to continue. They represent the frustration of desperate men who themselves are consumed with rancour over the supercilious and arrogant manner in which the US conducts its affairs against certain peoples and countries in this fractious world community.

The US claims that it has (unspecified) world responsibilities — whatever that means — but who gave them those responsibilities and why are they discharged with so many double standards? To quote Sophocles: "Ugly deeds are taught by ugly deeds."
Ed Simpson,
Apsley, Ontario, Canada

I WAS visiting family in the United States when the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed. The typical stunned response to these attacks was: "Why us? Why the American embassy?"

Part of the answer may be drawn from David Gough's article (Grief unites Kenyans as death toll mounts, *August 16) in* which Israeli *rescue workers* criticise their US *counterparts* for focusing rescue *efforts on* embassy employees only. "I've never seen such behaviour," comments one of the Israelis. Unfortunately, "such behaviour" is commonplace in many embassies, and in the world's poorer countries. Ethnocentric arrogance, racist attitudes and a lack of common courtesy and common sense are too often standard fare from embassy employees.

The destruction of the US embassies in East Africa is indefensible, and I hope the culprits are soon discovered and brought to justice. Such decisions to use violence are ultimately as arrogant and irresponsible as the situations that they claim to address. Yet, when the US media or individuals in recent weeks have asked, "Why us?", it has been disturbingly easy to imagine where some of the resentment against the embassies could come from.

One needs to only consider the people turned away each day in tears, not because they have been told No, but because they have been shabbily treated. For every embassy employee who deals with the public competently and considerately, there seems to be an incompetent and inconsiderate counterpart. The recent bombings strike me as a politicised payback for snubbery and snobbery.
J J...,
...bat, Morocco

Strange allies in Afghanistan

TURKMENISTAN is one of the three Central Asian states that shares a border with Afghanistan. Yet, unlike its neighbours, the government of Turkmenistan has not made any public displays of anxiety [illegible] bours, August 16). That sets it apart from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia. This is probably due to potential business deals between Turkmenistan and the Taliban government in Kabul.

In 1996 a $2 billion gas pipeline project to deliver Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan was being studied by the Saudi Delta Oil company and the United States Unocal corporation. Had it not been for the inconvenience of the Afghan civil war, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and the Taliban government would have benefited handsomely from this project.

But the project is likely to remain a pipe-dream. Even if victorious the Taliban will not bring peace to Afghanistan. The civil war will not end until neighbouring states cease, once and for all, their interference and proxy wars. Pakistan's support for the Taliban is an open secret and the US administration has done little to restrain Islamabad's involvement. That is probably because Taliban forces are fiercely anti-Iranian and anti-Russian.

This bizarre alignment makes the Taliban a natural ally of the US; the most rigidly religious group in the world stands in the same camp as the self-declared champion of universal human rights and democracy.
(Dr) Shahram Akbarzadeh,
La Trobe University,
Victoria, Australia

RICHARD GALPIN says: "Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan — which border Afghanistan . . ." Kazakhstan does not border Afghanistan; but of the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan does.
Tor A Afarli,
Trondheim, Norway

The burden of learning

PROFESSOR Peter Owens warns about the downsides of adopting a user-pays tuition fee system for university education: huge loan burdens; tired students in class because of concurrent part-time jobs; and high drop-out rates (Learning the hard way, August 16).

New Zealand has had experience of a tuition fee/loan scheme system for about five years.

As a university lecturer my observations of the New Zealand scheme support two of his negatives. Many students are accumulating such huge debts that there are certain to be significant social ramifications down the line, such as substantially delaying the purchase of a house and the raising of a family.

After much debate in the mid-1990s the government committed itself to a 25 per cent tuition fee: 75 per cent subsidy (as they call it) ratio to reflect the supposed private/public benefit of higher education. However, in the recent budget this policy was abandoned and the subsidy was cut to 72 per cent for 1999. Tuition fees and student debts are certain to increase again next year.

Excessive part-time employment is also a noticeable problem. The quantity and quality of study beyond formal classes and assignments is diminished and there is a mentality among many students of making a real effort only for work that contributes to course grades.

On the positive side, we now have the highest participation rate in higher education. Also, in contrast to a decade ago when higher education was more or less free to students, there was a substantial proportion of low-commitment, free-wheeling passengers among their cohort.

Today there are none. Market mechanisms may be anathema to many in the educational community, but they certainly help to focus the student mind.
(Dr) David Coy,
University of Waikato,
Hamilton, New Zealand

PETER OWENS is right about the United States approach to financing higher education: loading a student down with debt is a recipe for disaster. Why not give a student a grant, as in the old days, in exchange for a permanent income tax surcharge? Essentially have society make an equity investment in him or her instead of debt. That way, since the surcharge would apply to all income, the wealthy would not apply and we would not even need a means test.

Under the new proposals Oxbridge may become inaccessible to the "lower classes" as low-income students are frightened off by the prospect of a mountain of debt. What a legacy for New Labour. I read a statement by a Tory minister not long ago, to the effect that now that so many local universities are available, impecunious students should live at home. But I had hoped for better from Tony Blair.
Brian A Jones,
Brooklyn, New York, USA

Straight talk in German

THE FIRST of William Drozdiak's misunderstandings is his [illegible], which does not mean a form of general "Teutonic resistance to change", but is a name for red tape and politicians putting off reforms demanded by the people (The Germans have a word for it, August 9).

The second misconception is obviously caused by his ignorance of linguistic matters: reductions of spelling rules by 50 per cent (from 212 to 112) and of comma rules by 80 per cent (from 52 to nine), which he calls "hardly revolutionary", are in fact tremendous alterations by linguistic standards.

Apart from that, even the most superficial investigation into the problem or even regular newspaper reading would have shown that spelling reforms were by no means "hailed as a major breakthrough" but met with harsh criticism at both the grassroots and expert level.

Outstanding linguists have pointed out that nearly all the simplifying effects have been lost during the process of cobbling together this patchwork of compromises. When musing on the problem of language acquisition and its "tricky tasks" Drozdiak mentions umlauts, hyphens and commas. He is evidently oblivious of the fact that each of those has its equivalent in English.

Nevertheless the last attempt at simplifying English spelling was presented to Parliament in 1949 and was defeated. Some background knowledge plus a broader perspective on the problems related to language reforms might well have prevented Drozdiak from airing such naive views.
Franziska Klumpp,
Berlin, Germany

Briefly

THOSE who fear the political consequences in Russia have forgotten one thing: any successor to Yeltsin would be faced with the same economic problems (August 16). The government can't pay its existing state employees, so imagine the implications of putting the whole nation back on the government payroll by restoring the command economy. That would be dangerous for the hardline communists — they would certainly have to take advice from the Chinese government on "market socialism". As for the extreme right, repression would only add fuel to the fire.

The days of Russia as a single state could be numbered if there is total economic collapse. What the West should be worried about is that Russia's nukes could fall into the hands of local rulers.
Clare Hartley,
London

AS A survivor of the German attempt to annihilate the Jews of Europe, I cannot understand why our prime minister's office and "the international Jewish community" object to the cross at Auschwitz (August 16).

The persecution and killing of Jews has been the practice of the Church since its inception. It found its culmination in the mass murder perpetrated by a Christian nation, which only followed a long established tradition. The cross is therefore a fitting symbol to be maintained at Auschwitz, the most notorious of all murder installations.

It should serve as a reminder to my fellow Jews that the cross is at the root of our sufferings, and that Auschwitz is not a holy shrine.
David Ben-Dor,
Ramat-Gan, Israel

FIONA MEEHAN, who works in Mekelle, capital of Ethiopia's Tigray province, talks about "certain facts getting lost" (August 9).

As a foreign journalist living in Eritrea I could have written that same letter, only changing the names of the countries. If you look at the world media, where does all the news come from? Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital. And where do the facts, and actually every sense of proportion, get lost? In Addis Ababa.
Martin Stolk,
Asmara, Eritrea

AT THE last Lambeth Conference, some European bishops wanted to discuss polygamy, but were told by African bishops not to dabble in a culture they knew nothing about (Hard line on gays 'will help Church relations', August 16).
(Canon) Neville Boundy,
Bristol

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Yeltsin redraws the political map

James Meek in Moscow

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin sacked his entire government for the second time in five months and brought back the man he fired, Viktor Chernomyrdin, as prime minister.

Russia's political map was torn up and redrawn last Sunday as Mr Yeltsin unambiguously named Mr Chernomyrdin as his preferred successor, and parliament moved to claim radically enlarged sovereign powers.

In a humbling moment that may mark the start of a gradual withdrawal from the helm of state, Mr Yeltsin appeared on national television to heap praise on Mr Chernomyrdin, whom he abruptly sacked as prime minister five months ago and has been forced to reinstate.

"No one expected that the world financial crisis would hurt Russia so badly," he said. "In these circumstances the main priority is not to allow ourselves to slip backwards, and to ensure stability. What we need today is heavyweights. I believe Chernomyrdin's weight and experience is what is called for."

For the first time the president, aged 66, who has tipped many successors in off-the-cuff remarks and was thought to be seeking a constitutional loophole to run for a third term in 2000, told the country that he would back his new prime minister, in effect putting a time limit on his own turbulent political career.

Chernomyrdin: back in charge

"Behind my proposal lies another important consideration: to ensure the succession of power in the year 2000," he said. "Chernomyrdin's main qualities are decency, honesty and thoroughness. I think these will be the deciding arguments in the presidential election. Neither power, nor being out of power, have spoiled him."

There will be scepticism that Mr Yeltsin is sincere, but the political and business coalition that backed him in 1996 believes he is unelectable and looks to Mr Chernomyrdin to protect its interests. There was broad support for parliament approving him quickly to tackle the country's continuing financial crisis.

The rouble fell 13 kopecks against the dollar, 2 per cent of its value; banks were still refusing to honour household depositors' hard currency accounts; and a meeting of Russian officials with Western creditors failed to reach agreement about debt rescheduling.

Presidential hopeful Alexander Lebed, Russia's chief foreign loan envoy Anatoly Chubais, and the man Mr Chernomyrdin replaced, Sergei Kiriyenko, all urged the lower house, the State Duma, to approve the nominee's candidacy.

But Boris Nemtsov, a senior minister in the outgoing cabinet and once seen as Mr Yeltsin's natural heir, spoke out against the appointment. Declaring that he would not serve in Mr Chernomyrdin's government if asked, the liberal seen as the archetypal young reformer said nothing would change in Russia until its oligarchic imitation of a market economy was done away with. Mr Chernomyrdin has been brought in with the oligarchs' backing.

"Either the president's decisions are right, or they are not discussed," he said acidly. "Palace intrigues played a role in what happened."

Aware of how severely Mr Yeltsin has been weakened by the events of the past few days and that Mr Chernomyrdin has been brought in to build a new political coalition, Duma representatives on Monday demanded fundamental changes to the way that Russia is governed in exchange for supporting the prime minister-designate.

Gennady Seleznyov, the moderate Communist who chairs the lower house, said Mr Chernomyrdin had agreed to form a coalition government that included nominees from a spectrum of political parties. He said government officials and representatives from the two houses of parliament would meet this week to draw up an economic crisis programme.

Mr Seleznyov, hoping to realise a long-cherished dream of limiting the vast powers given to the president by the 1993 constitution, said the Duma would enshrine in law a presidential pledge not to interfere in the government's work.

Going further, the three main left-patriotic blocs in parliament, led by the Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, demanded a complete change of economic course in exchange for considering Mr Chernomyrdin's candidacy.

They called for nationalisation of industry, protectionism, the resignation of Mr Yeltsin and a redesigned constitution that would make Russia a parliamentary state.

"In the face of the disaster threatening our fatherland, the time has come to consolidate all sound forces in Russian society," they said.

"This decision lacks any logic," said parliamentary leftist Nikolai Ryzhkov. "When Yeltsin sacked Chernomyrdin five months ago, he sacked him for a reason."

Mr Kiriyenko, a 36-year-old banker from Nizhny Novgorod, never had a political base in parliament, which disliked his political liberalism, and was regarded with suspicion by the powerful businessmen and regional leaders who control much of Russia's wealth. They feared he might implement laws that forced them to pay tax or go bankrupt.

The catalyst for Mr Kiriyenko's downfall was last week's devaluation of the rouble and the debt default, which occurred despite his success in July in persuading the IMF to grant Russia an emergency loan.

Finance, page 14



WATER invades the Bangladeshi port of Narayanganj, cutting rail and ferry links with the rest of the country. The worst flooding in Bangladesh for 10 years has left millions of people marooned and clinging to their swamped homes.

The floods have engulfed two-thirds of the delta country for more than six weeks, and disrupted the lives and work of 25 million people.

More than 550 people have died, and with the high water expected to remain until mid-September when the rainy season ends, the prospect is that many more will die.

The 1988 floods, the worst in recent memory, killed more than 5,000 people.

Many farmers have been unable to plant their crops on time, and wells have been contaminated. The government estimates damage so far at $230 million.

PHOTOGRAPH: RAFIQUR RAHMAN

Suu Kyi ends road protest

Reuters in Rangoon

THE Burmese opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, returned home in an ambulance on Monday, ending a 13-day protest against the military government's restrictions on her movements.

She and three supporters had refused to leave their mini-van just outside the capital Rangoon since August 12, when their route west was blocked.

Hours before her protest ended, her National League for Democracy party issued a statement saying that senior party members had begged her to call it off because of her "critical health condition".

Last Sunday the NLD warned that she was dehydrated, suffering from constipation and "might go into shock any time".

It said she was willing to end the protest only if the authorities freed 97 of her supporters held since May. There is no indication that the government has met this demand.

A diplomat quoted NLD sources as saying that Ms Suu Kyi was "very poorly". He said the authorities had set up heavily guarded road blocks around the gates to her compound.

A government statement said the ailments Ms Suu Kyi was complaining of were "common ailments that are easily treatable".

Her protest followed a similar standoff last month, which the military forcibly ended and after which she had to rest due to dehydration.

Shortly before Ms Suu Kyi returned home, more than 100 students staged a protest in support of the NLD's demand for a parliament to be assembled. The sit-down protest, which was broken up by riot police, was the first of its kind since December 1996, when the authorities closed the country's universities to prevent student demonstrations.

One Rangoon-based diplomat, contacted by telephone from Bangkok, quoted witnesses as saying that riot police took away two truckloads of protesters. Police closed off roads around the university after the protest.

Rangoon university was a hotbed of anti-government protest in 1988, when the military crushed a student-led uprising for democracy. Diplomats said the protesters had been wearing red headbands like those that became popular during the uprising.

The Week

CANADA'S federal government scored a major victory when the Supreme Court decided in an historic ruling that the province of Quebec cannot secede without first getting the government's consent.
Washington Post, page 16

THE remains of 21 bodies were unearthed from multiple graves by Indonesian human rights commissioners in the north Sumatran province of Aceh. The discovery reinforces locals' claims that atrocities were committed by the army during the regime of General Suharto.

Meanwhile the army sacked Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto, a son-in-law of Suharto, following investigations into the abduction of political activists.

PHOOLAN Devi, a bandit leader turned politician, was in hiding after police in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh tried to arrest her on charges of mass murder, abduction and robbery.

KING Hussein of Jordan appointed his leading courtier, Fayez Tarawneh, to form a new government after the cabinet offered its resignation amid a growing scandal over contaminated drinking water.

A LEADING Italian insurance company, Assicurazioni Generali, has agreed to pay $100 million to honour thousands of pre-war policies taken out by people later victimised by the Nazis.

AN INCREASING number of middle-aged women are smoking, a World Health Organisation conference in Vienna heard. In Asia and Russia, the number of women smokers has risen fastest.

THE New Zealand government announced new gun control measures but stopped short of banning military-style semi-automatic weapons despite widespread public support for such action.

PROSTITUTION in Southeast Asia is one of the region's big employers and earners, an International Labour Organisation report said. It accounts for between 2 per cent and 14 per cent of GDP in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

NORWEGIAN police arrested three Greenpeace activists after a 48-hour occupation of the Deepsea Bergen rig in the Norwegian Sea.

JOEL Barr, the American defector who became one of the most important figures in the modernisation of the Soviet Union's elaborate air defence network, has died in St Petersburg at the age of 82.

Factory rubble yields no sign of arms

David Hirst in Khartoum

THERE was precious little sign of anything sinister when foreign journalists got to the controversial chemical plant that the American cruise missiles hit. No sign, anyway, that anyone had been trying to hide anything, or planned to do so. Access was easy. I simply said I was a journalist, and was invited to go around as I pleased — provided I did not disturb anything.

Everything had to be left in place, just as it was after 7.30pm on Thursday last week when the missiles smashed into it with such deadly accuracy that they barely damaged adjoining buildings.

In the reception area, samples of its wares were scattered around: Shifatrup, Shifamol, Shifacef. When I picked one up, Alammadin Shibli, the export manager, carefully replaced it. No one, he explained, must touch anything before international experts examined the site.

Dr Shibli's great hopes were pinned on the laboratory. The bulk of the plant is utterly demolished but the laboratory is the least damaged. There, amid the rubble, one can make out phials that are still discernibly intact. "This is what we will show the investigators," he said. "In those bottles are the re-agents that will prove what we really did here — and it had nothing to do with chemical weapons."

A leading opposition lawyer, Ghazi Suleiman, represents Salah Idriss, the owner of the Shifa plant. In spite of his hostility to Sudan's Islamic government, Mr Suleiman strongly criticises the US attacks. "The US has the right to defend itself against terrorism," he said. "But on behalf of my client . . . I want to persuade the Americans that they have made a mistake. This was no chemical weapons factory; do you think that, if it was, all the country's pharmacy students would come to visit as part of their training? The Americans could not have found its equal, for quality and sophistication, in all of Sudan."

The US raid has helped the government as it faces an ever-rising sea of troubles — famine in the south, civil war, international hostility, and mounting unpopularity at home.

"The government could not be happier," said a lawyer who wished to remain anonymous. "Even if that factory were producing chemical weapons, it could have turned the raid to its advantage, but imagine what it can make of it if it was not."

The regime, which has long occupied a prominent place on the US list of "terrorist states", clearly intends to do all it can to get the US for a kind of hi-tech terrorism of its own. It wants the United Nations Security Council to debate "this flagrant act of criminal aggression", and an on-the-spot international investigation.

The international inquiry is one part of the Sudanese government's strategy. The other, the domestic one, is to exploit to the hilt the patriotic indignation produced by the raid and, above all, exploit it against the opposition. Last Saturday President Omar el-Bashir addressed "the march of anger" that his government had laid on. Thousands of soldiers, schoolchildren and government employees, trucked in for the occasion, paraded through Khartoum shouting "America must be destroyed" and "Yesterday Nairobi, tomorrow the White House". Mr Bashir told them that with its raid the US had "opened the doors of holy war and paradise" to a people familiar "with the sweetness of martyrdom".

But his strongest rhetoric was reserved for the exile opposition, a coalition of Arab and other Muslim northerners and African southerners. John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army controls large segments of the south; the Arab Muslims have more recently seized border regions in the Kassala and Port Sudan area of the north. "There are those who are much worse than Clinton," he said, "and they are Sudanese." It was these "traitors", according to last week's banner headlines, "who admitted urging the US to strike". They were trying to "climb to power on American shoulders".

This is just the kind of demagogy said Mr Suleiman, to which the raid was bound to give rise. "We are invited to find ourselves looking to the sky" — for the external enemy — "instead of where the real problems lie, which is right here, on the ground, and of our government's making."

Plant 'was making nerve gas'

THE British government claimed last Sunday it had independent evidence that Osama bin Laden, the Saudi dissident millionaire, has been conspiring to achieve a chemical and biological weapons capability to sustain an international campaign of terrorism, *write Guardian reporters*.

In the face of growing concern about the United States' choice of targets for last week's retaliatory cruise missile attack, the Defence Secretary, George Robertson, said Whitehall had also acquired "independent evidence" that Mr bin Laden was involved in the recent attacks on US embassies in east Africa.

His comments came as the US justified its bombing raid on Sudan — as well as that in Afghanistan — by insisting the Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum had a role in producing chemical weapons.

The US national security adviser, Sandy Berger, said Washington had "physical evidence" that the Shifa plant was making ingredients for VX nerve gas.

Mr Robertson's stance startled some leftwing critics. He said that if British interests had been attacked in such a manner, the Labour government would retaliate in the same way — despite complaints from Moscow and the Islamic world that Washington should have taken its case to the United Nations.

Tony Benn, the former Labour cabinet minister who strongly criticises his government's support for the US attacks, said: "The overwhelming majority of evidence . . . indicates that there were no chemical weapons being made in the Sudan."

Labour critics also claim that the Foreign Office was not consulted before Tony Blair gave his backing to President Clinton.

Congolese rebels prepare to move towards the frontline against government soldiers PHOTO: CORINNE DUFKA

Angola troops pour in to bolster Kabila

David Gough and agencies in Kinshasa

ANGOLA continued to send troops into Congo this week and confirmed that it was providing military support to President Laurent Kabila. Angolan state radio said: "The government of Angola is participating in this effort so that we can find a political solution which will put an end to the crisis."

Witnesses in Cabinda, the Angolan enclave in former Zaire, said Angolan troops poured into Congo for the third day running on Monday to help fight rebels seeking to overthrow Mr Kabila.

They said that the Angolan convoys comprised tanks, armoured personnel carriers and trucks carrying hundreds of soldiers. Military transport planes had been flying into Cabinda since the end of last week, they said. And rebels say that Angolan MiG fighter planes have attacked rebel-held towns.

President Kabila's government says the rebellion is being led by the governments and military of Rwanda and Uganda, and that Congo's call for help from neighbouring countries is a response to "a foreign invasion of sovereign territory".

A lorryload of Zimbabwean troops was seen driving through Kinshasa last weekend as unconfirmed reports reached the capital of a successful Angolan attack on Kitona on the Atlantic coast. The reports claimed that the Angolans had captured the city's airport and cut off the advancing rebels from their rear supply base.

Quoting an unidentified Angolan military source, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported that Angola now had 2,000 troops in Lower Congo province.

The rebels said they had taken the strategic northern town of Kisangani, Congo's third largest town. The government denied the report. According to diplomats in Kinshasa, the military situation remains confused and is best described as fluid.

What is without doubt is that the arrival of foreign troops has considerably boosted President Kabila, and the sight of Zimbabwean troops in Kinshasa in lorries loaded with ammunition has bolstered his army's sagging morale.

It will also have gone a long way towards reassuring the people of Kinshasa, who remain remarkably calm in the face of what seems an inexorable rebel advance.

Botha fined and warned he could be sent to jail

Alex Duval Smith in Johannesburg

THE war of wills between P W Botha and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is likely to continue, despite last week's court verdict that the former apartheid president was guilty of ignoring its summons.

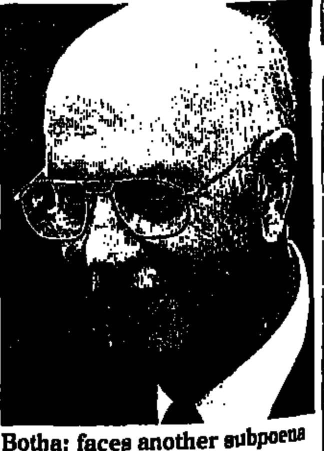
The court in George, Western Cape, fined Mr Botha 10,000 rand ($1,600), with the alternative of 12 months in jail, and imposed an additional 12 months' jail sentence suspended for five years for refusing to obey a subpoena to testify before the commission's human rights violations committee.

Mr Botha, aged 82, who is to appeal, is likely to be called by the commission's amnesty committee. Another refusal to testify could bring his suspended sentence into effect.

The human rights violations committee ended its work last month and is due to report to President Nelson Mandela in October. But the amnesty committee — which still has to consider about 1,200 appeals for clemency from perpetrators of apartheid crimes — will continue sitting for another six months at least.

The former law and order minister Adriaan Vlok, the former police commissioner Johan van der Merwe, and the former police hit squad commander Eugene de Kock have named Mr Botha in their amnesty applications as having directly ordered murders, bombings and the torture of apartheid opponents.

Mr Botha, who ruled South Africa for 11 years until he suffered a stroke and was ousted by the reformist F W de Klerk in 1989, showed no emotion when the black magistrate, Victor Lugaju read his verdict and delivered sentence.


Botha: faces another subpoena

Mr Lugaju said that Mr Botha was "not in good health" and was a "first offender". But he dismissed the defence's argument that the subpoena was technically flawed and ruled that, contrary to Mr Botha's claim, no agreement existed for him to submit written answers.

Later the commission chairman, Alex Boraine, called on Mr Botha to change his mind about testifying. He said the suspended sentence made any further refusal to testify "very much more serious".

"We hope that if the amnesty committee needs Mr Botha's evidence he will reconsider his attitude," he said.

● The South African church leader, Allan Boesak, denied stealing charitable contributions from the pop star Paul Simon, Coca-Cola, charities and others when his trial opened in Cape Town this week.

Dr Boesak — former leader of the ANC in the Western Cape and president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches — denied 32 counts of fraud and theft.

World Bank green code blocks pipeline

Paul Brown

AN OIL pipeline that could transform the economic future of two of Africa's poorest countries, Chad and Cameroon, is being held up by environment staff at the World Bank, who say it does not conform to the organisation's newly adopted green code.

The issue is causing internal strife at the Bank between traditional economists, who believe that the benefits of mega-projects trickle down to the poor, and new staff who have leaked the environmental assessments to try to halt the project.

It is likely to form a test case when the $2.6 billion, 1,600km pipeline is considered by the Bank's governors in October.

The pipeline is to be built by a consortium of Exxon, Shell and Elf, and is expected to double the size of Chad's economy in 10 years. The first of the 900 million barrels of oil reserves is likely to reach the coast by late 2001 if the plan is approved this autumn.

Among the issues raised by the World Bank's environmental team's report, a copy of which has been sent to the Guardian, is the future of pygmy tribes in Cameroon and traditional pastoral people in both countries, whose lifestyle will be disrupted by the pipeline and the population influx it is likely to bring.

Exxon, which heads the consortium, needs the Bank's backing to get $1.6 billion in loans from international banks to finance the project. It is pushing for a go-ahead before the end of the year.

Korinna Horta, from the Environment Defence Fund in Washington, where the World Bank is based, said: "Exxon is lobbying very hard at the Bank and has the backing of the traditional economic lobby who are prepared to overlook the very real environmental dangers for the sake of development . . . But there is resistance [at the Bank] because of the fate of the tribal people, who get no benefit."

The World Bank team, headed by Glen Armstrong, the manager of the environment division, says the plan "neglects the Bank's policy on natural habitats". The policy says the Bank "will not support projects which involve significant conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats, unless there are no feasible alternatives".

The pipeline is routed through the Mbere Rift valley in northern Cameroon and the Deng Deng forest in east-central Cameroon. The Bank says it has been given no information on alternative routes and fears for the future of the rare black rhino in the affected forest.

Key
Oil fields
Oil pipeline
NIGER
L. Chad
N'djaména
NIGERIA
CHAD
BENIN
Miandoum/Bolobo/Kome fields
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
CAMEROON
Mbere R.
Lagos
Deng Deng Forest
Gulf of Guinea
Bioko Is.
Yaoundé
Kribi
500 km

'20 per cent' of Indonesia loans stolen

John Aglionby in Jakarta

THE World Bank tried to smooth its relations with Indonesia last week after a leaked internal Bank report claimed that 20 per cent of its development funds for Jakarta were embezzled by corrupt Indonesian officials.

Some analysts alleged that the figure was a fair estimate and that the Bank was not only aware of the corruption but did little to prevent it.

But the Bank's director for Indonesia, Dennis de Tray, said after meeting the country's senior economics minister, Ginandjar Kartasasmita, that there was no substance to the figure quoted in the report.

"I don't deny the problems [of corruption] but the 20 per cent figure is anecdotal. I don't know where the report gets the figure," he said in reference to an article in the Asian Wall Street Journal, which printed the leak.

The World Bank report, from 1997, said that much of the corruption could be attributed to the ruling Golkar party, particularly in the run-up to the general election that May.

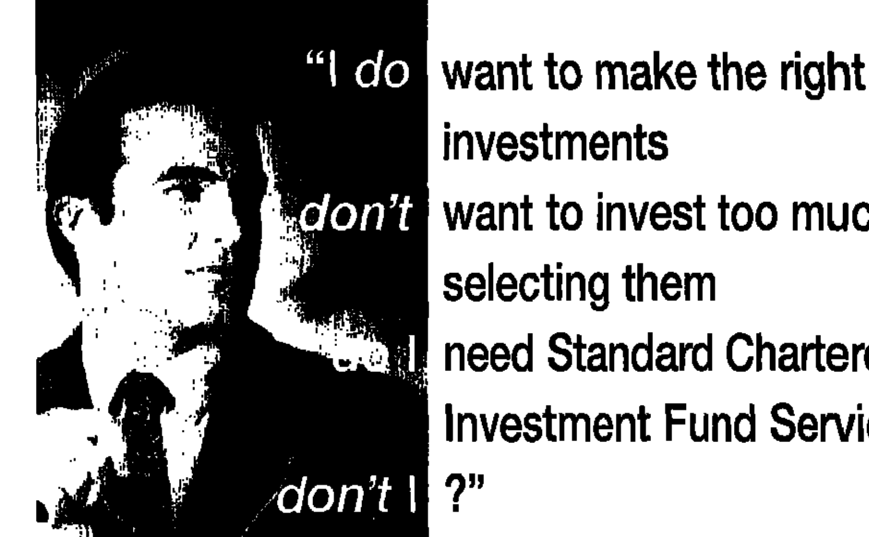
The Bank's east Asia and Pacific director, Jean-Michel Severino, confirmed in Washington last week that the report exists but said: "The number [20 per cent] was only mentioned in the report because it was suggested that corruption was substantial. We have no idea whether this is a correct figure."

Because the Bank had no idea of the amount it would not try to recoup the money.

The director of a US consultancy in Jakarta said last week that the figure of 20 per cent was "in the right ballpark", but added that it would be impossible to find out the true amount.

The Bank said it "closely monitors and supervises project implementation, and whenever we find any misappropriation we act firmly and immediately to stop fund disbursement".

The Indonesian president, B J Habibie, who promised to root out corruption when he replaced President Suharto in May, is coming under fire for failing to keep his word.



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A double Bill of fact and fiction

WASHINGTON DIARY
Gary Younge

IN A cinema on Washington's Wisconsin Avenue in January, shortly after the Monica Lewinsky story broke, there was a short preview for the film Primary Colors. The scene showed Emma Thompson, playing a betrayed candidate's wife, slapping John Travolta, the love-cheat and presidential hopeful, shortly after she learned of his latest sexual digression.

"At a cinema near you," said the deep, booming voice on screen. "It's already here," shouted one man in the audience, and the theatre erupted into laughter.

Washington and Hollywood are in a constant state of symbiosis. Their relationship does not represent a see-sawing tension between fact and fiction but a blurred continuum where art imitates real life and then real life catches up and, at times, takes over and starts imitating art. This is a nation whose most popular post-war president, Ronald Reagan, did not make his name in the primaries but in celluloid, and then conducted foreign policy as though he was John Wayne. The singer Gil Scott Heron referred to it as "living in a B movie".

And so it was again last week when reporters at Martha's Vineyard, covering a president steeped in scandal, started watching a pay-per-view film when they received instructions to head for Edgartown school for a national security announcement. The president informed them that the United States had unleashed a missile attack on suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan and what they believed to be a chemical weapons factory in Sudan.

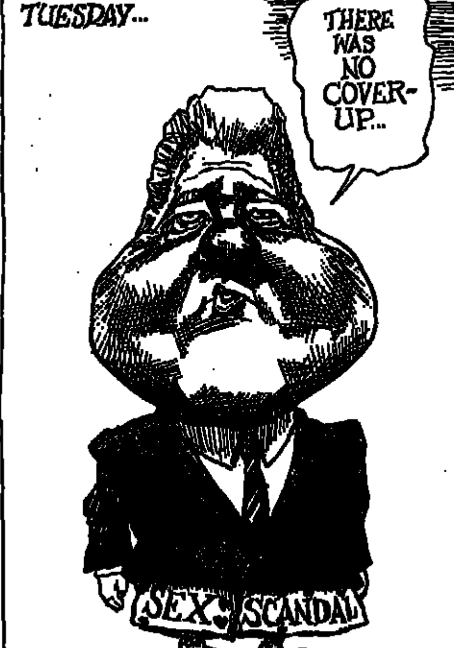
The film they had been watching was Wag The Dog, the tale of a US president embroiled in a sex scandal involving a young woman in a beret. The president's right-hand man confects a confrontation with Albania in order to divert public attention from the leader's own troubles.

The comparison was so compelling that it provided one of the first questions to the defence secretary, William Cohen, at a Pentagon news conference: how he would respond to people who think that the strikes were prompted by the same desire to keep the president's private life out of the news.

"The only motivation driving this action was our absolute obligation to protect the American people from terrorist activities," said Cohen. "No other consideration has been involved."

On the face of it Cohen's response was as unconvincing as it was predictable. The timing of events served Clinton. On the day the attacks were launched an embittered Lewinsky was testifying before the grand jury for a second time, providing the independent prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, with evidence that could have bolstered his case for obstruction of justice. A backlash was growing among the president's own Democratic congressmen, against the tone and content of his televised confession to the nation only days before. Far from putting the matter to rest, Clinton's national address appeared to have aggravated matters.

There was even talk of him being subpoenaed to appear before the grand jury again. When the White House informed television networks that he was about to make a speech, at least one correspondent asked them if he was about to resign.



Elsewhere, just as the press pack were waiting outside the federal courthouse for Lewinsky to come out their beepers went off with news of an imminent announcement. Within minutes they knew that their front-page story was no longer secure.

The run-up to the decision to bomb also raises suspicions. The day that Clinton met his foreign policy advisers to begin planning the action was the day he decided he would have to tell the truth about his affair. The day he testified and then spoke to the nation was the day he reviewed the strikes with Samuel Berger, his national security adviser. The day he left for Martha's Vineyard, his public credibility in tatters and his family life in crisis, was the day he confirmed that the plans should be put into action.

On paper, from the viewpoint of Clinton's domestic standing, it all seems too good to be true. It is. There had been talk of striking back at the Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden, who national security circles suspect was the chief architect of the Kenya and Tanzania embassy bombs from the day they went off. The timing was determined by intelligence reports that a group of Bin Laden's allies were supposed to be at the camp on Thursday last week.

The attacks did indeed provide some respite from the legal and political onslaught the president had faced over the past few weeks, but to think that he could have devised the attack for his own ends both overstates his involvement in the decision-making process and the degree to which those who carried it out would have been prepared to assist him in this regard.

As commander-in-chief of the armed forces the president does have the final say in whether strikes should go ahead or not. But the details about whom to attack, when to attack and what to attack is largely left to professionals in the field. Moreover the president is not well regarded by the military or the CIA. This is the man who opposed the Vietnam war, dodged the draft and was at loggerheads with the Pentagon over gays in the military from his first weeks in the White House. He is also accused of using FBI files to discredit key figures in the administration of George Bush, a former CIA boss. What interest would they have in putting their credibility on the line to save his political bacon?

As he took his seat in the Oval office — site of many of his dalliances with Lewinsky — to explain the military action to the nation, he was the beneficiary of serendipity, not cynicism. Here was the Comeback Kid, in an apparently desperate situation brought about by his own recklessness, about to revive his fortunes by playing the statesman on the international stage. This wasn't Wag The Dog, it was Groundhog Day.

EU members strike a rare chord of harmony

Europe this week
Martin Walker

THERE is little point in continuing to bemoan the pitiful sight of Europe trying to live up the Amsterdam treaty's objective of "a common foreign and security policy". The world and the Europeans are used to this habitual disarray by now. So it was a mild surprise when most European countries came out with a more or less grudging approval of the United States' robust response to the bomb attacks on its embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

Britain, predictably, gave full support to the strikes on alleged terrorist bases in Sudan and Afghanistan. So did Germany's Helmut Kohl. As for Austria, the current holder of the European Union's rotating presidency, its foreign minister, Wolfgang Schüssel, gave his country's lukewarm endorsement on the basis that the Americans had acted with sufficient evidence of guilt.

That accounted for the troika — the past, current and next presidents of the European Council — who comprise the nearest Europe gets to an executive committee on foreign policy. France also backed the US action, saying that the bomb attacks "should not go without an answer".

That support is probably rather more than President Clinton expected from his chief European allies. In the past they have all refused to allow the US to use their air space to reinforce Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur war. And in President Reagan's anti-terrorist air strike against Libya in 1985, only Britain gave support. However, as European Commission officials noted last week in their cautious, off-the-record way, the Council had already committed itself earlier to the international struggle against terrorism. And the wealthy Saudi exile, Osama bin Laden, had made little secret of his determination to stop at nothing to remove "the domination of Islam's holy places by Christians and Jews for the first time since the days of the Prophet".

Less noticed was last week's move by Nato forces — during exercises in Albania — against buildings in Tirana said to be used by Islamic fundamentalists from Egypt who were supposedly supporting their fellow Muslims in Kosovo. Nato apparently made it clear to Albania that the price of its support is eschewing such dangerous fundamentalist allies.

Europe also reacted in an almost coherent fashion to the latest financial disasters in Russia. The EU is to propose and help implement a tough bank restructuring plan, along with a new and more powerful regulatory authority for the financial sector, as its contribution to help solve Russia's economic crisis. The EU is proposing no new financial aid, beyond the modest $260 million a year spent on the Russian nuclear safety programme and the Tacis aid scheme, most of it directed to management training and economic reform at the micro level.

Despite weeks of promises to maintain the rouble's parity, and the disbursement of all the $5 billion received so far in the latest International Monetary Fund package, Moscow devalued last week and also announced a unilateral moratorium on repaying its foreign debt, which amounts to at least a temporary default. Worse still, the initial announcement said that preference would be given to domestic debt-holders over foreign ones. This outraged the international banks, which are said to be most exposed. On advice from Western banks, Russia then said it would rethink this clause.

This is the first attempt by the EU, Russia's biggest trading partner by far, to play a major role in economic diplomacy with Moscow. The plan has the backing of Austria, Commission officials said last week, and reflects the growing frustration among European bankers and EU officials at the repeated failure of the Russian government to deliver the reforms it has promised.

"Russia is not a protectorate. It is a sovereign government, and we can only do as much as the Russians themselves are prepared to do," one EU official said. "But there has been a lot of aid, a lot of credits, and unless the Russians get serious about reform, donor fatigue is setting in."

There have been sharp exchanges in Brussels, reflecting similar debates in the Clinton administration, between financial officials who want to make any more aid contingent on reform, and defence and foreign policy-makers who insist that any aid is cheaper than the implications of a total collapse in a country with more than 10,000 nuclear warheads. So far, the defence and foreign policy arguments have prevailed, but the outrage of US and European banks at the devaluation and debt default that penalises them more than Russian bond-holders may tip the balance.

"We will support all the efforts of the Russian government to put into effect the IMF plan for economic reform, and we expect the Russian government and Duma to put these reforms into force," the Commission's president, Jacques Santer, said.

EU member states channel the bulk of Europe's aid to Russia through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank and the IMF. But the latest $22 billion IMF rescue package was pushed through at the insistence of the US, with France and Germany reluctant to continue offering Russia repeated guarantees that remove much of Moscow's incentive to impose the reforms the West wants to see. Besides improved tax collection and better budget discipline, this also means forcing some big financial houses into bankruptcy and cleaning out the Mafiya.

"All this depends on the Russians coming forward with specific requests for us to help, and their being prepared to play their part," a senior EU official who is drafting the package told the Guardian.

In sum, the Europeans fear that Russia is heading for a desperate winter, both financially and politically, while showing little sign yet of its readiness to take the tough medicine the IMF has prescribed. Unless the Russian government bites the reform bullet, all the Europeans will offer from now on is advice and technical support. They are no longer prepared to throw good money after bad.

Finance, page 14

Palestinian 'taxmen' put emphasis on extortion

Julian Borger

IBRAHIM Hussein al-Shawahin finds it hard to talk about tax, partly because it is a traumatic subject, but mainly, he says, because his front teeth have been smashed by self-appointed taxmen in the Palestinian police.

Mr Shawahin is a building contractor who did a lot of work with Israeli companies. Like many businessmen in the West Bank town of Hebron, he was known as a canny operator. But in late 1996 the tax authorities began to pursue him for unpaid VAT equivalent to $3,000.

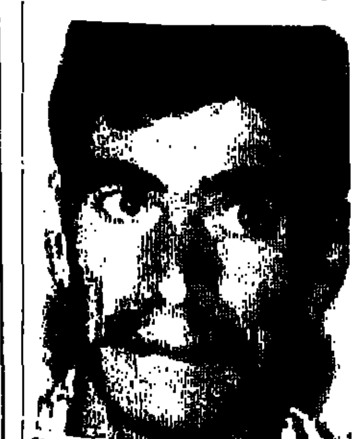
Mr Shawahin says he was unaware of the outstanding bill, and was taken by surprise when Palestinian security men arrested him in December that year. He was taken to Jericho and jailed without charges. After a few months he went before the district prosecutor, Ibrahim Amer, who gave him a choice: pay 250,000 shekels (around $66,000) or spend 10 years in jail.

"I told him I didn't owe that kind of money, that it was an obscene amount," Mr Shawahin says. But he was powerless. After 11 months, his family scraped the money together to buy his freedom.

His case is one of 36 documented in a report published last week by the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG), which accuses members of the Palestinian police, in connivance with Mr Amer, of extorting money through wrongful imprisonment and torture under the pretext of collecting taxes.

The report also accuses two of Yasser Arafat's paramilitary forces — the Preventive Security Service (PSS) and General Intelligence (GI) unit — of taking lead roles in the extortion.

"The PNA [Palestinian National Authority] ignores laws and principles in collecting taxes," the report says. "Ibrahim Amer for example does not arrest suspected individuals on the background of memos or complaints from the concerned tax department. Many of the detainees are held for over a year and a half without charges, without arrest orders and without being presented before a court of law. The same applies to the GI and the PSS who, together with Amer, behave as tax collectors, judges and the law."


Shawahin: tortured until he paid over 30,000 shekels in 'tax'

Of the 36 detainees who testified to the PHRMG, 35 said they had been tortured. This month an insurance broker, Walid al-Qawasmeh, was beaten to death, allegedly the victim of an overzealous attempt at extortion.

Mr Shawahin escaped a beating during his first 11 months in jail, but word clearly got around that he was an easy target. He was arrested again by the PSS in Hebron in February this year and tortured until he handed over 30,000 shekels.

"The finger in my left hand was broken . . . This caused me severe pain during the interrogation, and the interrogator refused to send me to a doctor for treatment. My front teeth were also broken, as well as two molars, from all the beating and slapping on my face," Mr Shawahin said. "I was exposed to *shabeh* [a technique involving shackling a prisoner in an excruciating position] continuously in the corridor and was prevented from sleeping for 36 hours straight."

When Mr Shawahin went to the Hebron tax authority after his ordeal, he was told his original tax estimate had been inflated. He owed only 8,500 shekels. There was no record of the 280,000 shekels he had handed over. He showed the taxmen a handwritten chit Mr Amer had given him, but was told it had no legal value.

According to the PHRMG report, Mr Amer, the PSS and GI have "collected" an estimated 8 million shekels in the past two years which has yet to find its way into the Palestinian treasury.

Bassem Eid, the PHRMG director, said the finance ministry had launched an inquiry into what had happened to the money.

Mr Amer was unavailable for comment. Marwan Kanafani, a Palestinian parliamentarian and one of Mr Arafat's media advisers, said a committee had been formed to look into the matter. "We are investigating it in a very responsible way. If this issue is used by the security forces to violate the rights of the Palestinian people, we will find out," Mr Kanafani said.

There has been a plethora of commissions of inquiry in the Palestinian Authority areas recently, but to little effect.

Nigerian prostitutes tout for business at a country lay-by in central Italy PHOTOGRAPH: KATZ PICTURES

Anti-vice drive arouses passions

John Hooper in Rome

IT HAS been dubbed "the summer of clean pavements": from Genoa to Trieste and from Rome to Milan, local authorities are pondering or have imposed a clampdown on streetwalkers and their clients.

Politically, economically and socially the issue is dynamite. It has already become the subject of a passionate national debate.

Hookers and pimps have been pouring into Italy in recent years — drawn by a seemingly prodigious appetite for commercial sex among Italian males. A police study released last week concluded that there were 25,000 foreign prostitutes in the country, 59 per cent of them Nigerians. On average they had 30 clients a week.

If the police estimates are accurate it means that around one in 25 of all Italians between the ages of 18 and 65 has some form of contact with a prostitute every seven days. The visible evidence does nothing to contradict this.

Not only are there inner-city areas dense with prostitution, but it has become almost impossible to take a drive in the countryside without passing a lay-by inhabited by statuesque young African women dressed in little more than lingerie. They cut especially incongruous figures in areas such as Tuscany and Umbria, where their "pitches" are set up in landscapes straight from the background to a Renaissance Madonna and child.

The council in Rimini, bent on cleaning up the Adriatic resort's seedy image, was the first to act this month. The mayor, Giuseppe Chicchi, said one favourite gathering place was drawing up to 220 transsexual and transvestite prostitutes at a time.

Fines on street-walkers and/or kerb-crawlers have since been introduced in Padua, Verona, Vicenza, Milan and Trieste. Police anti-prostitution patrols have been established in Florence, while in nearby Prato the authorities ordered a mass impounding of hookers' cars. New measures are on their way in Bologna and under consideration in Rome and Genoa.

The drive against vice slices through party differences. Mr Chicchi heads a centre-left administration. The clampdown in Milan was ordered by the deputy mayor from the formerly neo-fascist National Alliance.

Some local authorities have claimed they were motivated by no more than a desire to stop the traffic congestion prompted by kerb-crawling "johns". In most cases the fines have been imposed under by-laws against careless driving.

But councillors have also been responding to growing disquiet about an issue with implications for public health, law and order, and social morality. According to the police survey 12 per cent of Italy's prostitutes are HIV-positive, yet 43 per cent of their sexual contacts are without condoms. Livia Turco, a minister in Romano Prodi's centre-left cabinet, noted last week that it was customary for clients to offer double for unprotected sex. It was, she said, a particularly repellent practice in view of evidence that most of Italy's hookers were not sex workers, but sex slaves.

"Today, the market for prostitution is 80 per cent — I repeat, 80 per cent — composed of girls forced to take to the streets," she said.

Last week brought the latest in a string of horror stories — two Polish girls, lured to Italy by their cousins with the promise of a holiday, were then imprisoned by them, beaten, raped and threatened with a gun to the temple before being taken to the streets against their will. Several Albanian "prostitutes" have turned out to be the victims of abductions in their own country.

The law dealing with prostitution tolerantly — or, say critics, hypocritically — consigns it to a limbo between legality and illegality. It dates from 1958.

Initiating a lively exchange, the deputy mayor of Milan, Riccardo De Corato, argued: "Since then, many things have changed. Prostitution is a vehicle for much more serious criminal activities. Behind a streetwalker can lurk drug-trafficking, gaming, racketeering, theft and even kidnapping."

Yet in a society with an excess of laws, few of which are respected, the idea of sanctioning prostitution has aroused deep misgivings. Last week, at a nightclub in Rome, a gay rights group staged a mass "tart party" to gather funds to pay prostitutes' fines and signatures for a petition challenging the restrictions.

Commentators and politicians also criticise the restrictions, though most acknowledge the need for a change in the law and some argue for the creation of state-regulated brothels. Others question the effectiveness of any measure intended to curtail the "oldest profession".

"If not even the fear of Aids has managed to put the brakes on it," observed one columnist, "it is doubtful that mere policing will yield better results."

Pakistan's rich ponder economic crisis

Suzanne Goldenberg in Karachi

JIM AGHAZADEH chews the last inch of his cigar and ruminates on the row of vintage cars. As president of Pakistan's classic car club, he should have been savouring this month's 51st independence day rally as a moment of triumph. But Mr Aghazadeh is troubled, as are other well-off Pakistanis.

Two months after six test explosions made it the world's newest nuclear power, Pakistan stands on another threshold; this time of economic disaster.

The rupee has fallen by 15 per cent against the dollar, and with only $500 million in foreign currency reserves and $600 million due to be repaid next month on its $30 billion foreign debt, there are fears that Pakistan is on the verge of defaulting.

The gloom and uncertainty, especially for the majority of the 140 million Pakistanis who live in poverty, has even reached Mr Aghazadeh's classic car club.

"Now we are starting to feel guilty. There was a time it didn't bother us," he admits. "But now even the have-nots don't have anything any more."

The West punished India and Pakistan with sanctions for their nuclear tests in May, causing financial hardship. But Pakistan is economically the weaker, and its grip on democratic politics — it returned to civil rule just a decade ago — is tenuous.

Last month Washington grew so alarmed at the prospect of economic collapse that it allowed the sale of US wheat to restock Pakistani granaries. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait stepped in with emergency funds.

But for Irfan Puri, scion of the family firm which enjoys a virtual monopoly on Pakistan's fuel oil imports, it is business as usual. "If we default on our foreign debt, it has nothing to do with the blasts," he argues. "The sanctions just made our situation nakedly visible. This is what we are worth. The economic situation in Pakistan today is due to corruption."

Economists and businessmen argue that Pakistan's elected leaders have failed to overhaul a system so bedevilled by corruption that half its transactions are attributed to a parallel black economy, remaining content to let it lurch from crisis to crisis.

Nuzhat Ahmad, director of the Applied Economics Research Centre at Karachi university, says chronic political instability has discouraged long-term economic planning. Three elected governments have been sacked in the past 10 years, after accusations of corruption and financial incompetence.

Like many Pakistanis, she believes history will repeat itself: Mr Sharif will be forced from office, especially if the rising cost of living leads to social unrest.



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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The Week in Britain James Lewis

Butcher censured over food poisoning outbreak

BRITAIN'S most serious outbreak of food poisoning, which killed 21 people and affected hundreds more, may have been made worse by the dishonesty of the butcher involved and the incompetence of environmental health officers.

These were among the conclusions of a fatal accident inquiry by Sheriff-Principal Graham Cox. He found that John Barr, a butcher at Wishaw, Lanarkshire, concealed the full extent of his business from council officials, and thought that six lives might have been saved if Mr Barr had been more honest about his selling of cold meats.

The outbreak of *E.coli 0157* began in November 1996, when infected stew was served at a church lunch for pensioners. It continued for some months and prompted a programme of improved hygiene from farmyard to food outlets after a separate investigation into *E.coli* poisoning by Hugh Pennington, professor of bacteriology at the University of Aberdeen.

The sheriff criticised training and supervision at Mr Barr's business; its failure to use proper temperature probes when cooking raw meat; the absence of cleaning schedules to reduce the risk of contamination; and the failure to separate processes, knives and equipment for raw and cooked meat.

Mr Barr, he said, had "paid only lip service" to officials. He had deceived them about his supplies to other shops and wholesalers before the outbreak and had therefore been exempted from registration as a supplier of cooked meat. But officials had also been slow to obtain information, and took five days to establish the connection between the church lunch and Mr Barr's business.

The Government may now be asked to consider banning the commercial cooking of meats unless it takes place on premises separate from butchers' shops.

THE FORTH Rail Bridge, the Lake District, Kew Gardens and the New Forest took their places on a list of British glories which the Government wants to see recognised as "wonders of the world", alongside the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall of China.

They are among 32 sites across the country proposed by the Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, for inclusion in the Unesco list of World Heritage Sites. Others include Liverpool's waterfront, the London-Bristol railway, Cornish tin mines, the Wash, and the east Devon and Dorset coastline.

Britain already has 17 World Heritage sites, including Stonehenge and Fountains Abbey. The listing of the Forth Bridge, an 1890 structure which now needs £40 million for maintenance, is a distinct possibility, though some of the other proposals were considered to be, at best, optimistic.

THE Spirit Zone of London's controversial Millennium Dome, which was to be dedicated to religion, will have to be scrapped if no sponsor for it can be found. A total of £100 million has so far been raised in sponsorship for the Dome's 14 exhibition zones but Liam Kane, managing director of the New Millennium Experience Company, said the Spirit zone was causing most problems.

The Dome's many critics were not surprised, having long argued that a glorified trade fair would be no place to celebrate 2,000 years of Christianity. And the other religions expected to participate — including Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and Hindus — have no particular reason to celebrate the year 2000. Mr Kane said he had not given up hope — "I say a prayer every night" — of raising the necessary £12 million for the Spirit zone.

Meanwhile the Millennium Commission has awarded grants of between £5 million and £50 million to 27 other projects — ranging from a National Space Centre in Leicestershire to an environmental Earth Centre on 27 acres of reclaimed slag heaps near Doncaster. All are said to be on time and within budget.

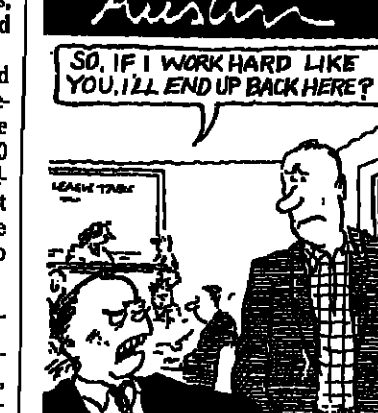
MPS criticised the Government's failure to act fast enough to combat the threat that the "millennium bug" will cause computer breakdowns across the public service in 2000. The Commons Public Accounts Committee was particularly critical of the record of the health service and its agencies responsible for ensuring its technology functions properly and does not put patients at risk.

The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, said that £400 million had been spent on getting the problem under control in key public services, but Conservative and Liberal Democrats did not share Mr Prescott's optimism, demanding more from him than "vague commitments".

THE UNEMPLOYED will be put to work as classroom assistants to help hard-pressed teachers prepare lessons and give more individual attention to pupils under a scheme dreamed up by a junior Welsh Office minister, Peter Hain.

The assistants will be recruited as part of the New Deal programme for helping jobless back into work. But they will not be foisted on to schools, and their suitability will be carefully checked before they are appointed.

The reactions of teachers' unions ranged from scepticism to outright hostility.






Leeds comprehensive student Lizzie Wharton, who now has seven As at A level PHOTOGRAPH SAVATH…

Tears and cheers at A level results

Guardian Reporters

IT WAS down to the local pub on Thursday last week for the undoubted Brainbox of Britain, followed by a Chinese meal with her family to celebrate an incredible seven A levels, all grade A.

Lizzie Wharton, 18-year-old star of a Leeds comprehensive, was also basking in her mother Jean's heartfelt comment: "What we're happiest about is that Lizzie is a normal, socialising type of person — she isn't the least bit odd."

Her envelope brought As in French, German, further maths, physics and general studies, to add to maximum grades in maths-and-mechanics and maths-and-statistics taken early at Allerton Grange high school. Lizzie, whose parents are both teachers, is heading for St Hugh's College, Oxford.

Six other pupils emerged as some of Britain's highest-flyers, with six A grades each: Lisa Hall of Colchester; Kathryn Huish of Heswall on Merseyside; Elaine Macdonald of Nailsea in Somerset; Paul Dent of Harrogate; Martin Griffiths of Huddersfield; and Matthew Lloyd of Oxford.

There was a sigh at Bradford Grammar School where students were taught the wrong English Literature text. All passed their exams.

But not all students were popping champagne. For some at County Upper School in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, there were tears.

"I'm absolutely shattered, I never thought something like this would happen," said Oliver Gospel, who needed an A and two Bs to study medicine at Liverpool university but got three Cs in chemistry, physics and maths and a B in general studies.

"I had a good cry when I opened the envelope . . . I can't believe that I won't be going to study medicine, particularly as the teachers predicted I would get better results."

But all was not lost for Mr Gospel. Two hours later he spoke to Liverpool university and was offered a place on the clinical engineering and material science course.

About two-thirds of freshers' university places available next term were allocated within hours of A level results coming out, and the race to fill the remaining vacancies is proceeding at a record rate.

Examiners said the pass rate had increased by 0.2 per cent to 87.8 per cent, the smallest improvement for more than a decade.

Tony Higgins, the chief executive of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, said: "All the indicators point to a huge interest in higher education, and there is no evidence to suggest that students are being deterred by tuition fees."

He said the number of students withdrawing applications was lower than last year.

Meanwhile a survey by the Institute of Management found that employers are sceptical about the value of A levels in the workplace, with almost half preferring to rely on their own tests to select employees.

Fertility link with fingers

SIZE does matter, but not where you think. Liverpool scientists report that they have discovered a connection between sperm count, finger length and hand symmetry, *writes Tim Radford.*

The hand is an outward sign of inward virility, according to Dr John Manning and colleagues at the University of Liverpool. They measured the hands of 60 men and 40 women attending a fertility clinic and found that men with the least symmetrical hands — where one was not the mirror image of the other — were also likely to have the lowest sperm count. Twelve men with asymmetries of up to 4mm between their hands produced almost no sperm.

Men whose ring finger was much longer than their index finger tended to have the highest levels of the sex hormone testosterone. But among women, those with longer index fingers tended to have the higher levels of fertility hormones.

Cities join European pool to buy low-emission vehicles

Paul Brown

TWENTY British cities and more than 100 in Europe have signed a deal to buy electric and low-emission vehicles and ban traditional cars, buses and lorries from at least part of their centres.

The idea is to produce a mass market for alternative vehicles by pledging to bulk purchase from European manufacturers and at the same time clean up the air.

In London, the boroughs of Westminster, Camden and Southwark are committed to the scheme, and Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham and Oxford have also signed up. Edinburgh, Glasgow and York are expected to join shortly.

Last week Southwark, which already has 94 low-emission vehicles, the largest fleet of its kind of any British local authority, took delivery of the first Citroën electric van in the UK. It cost £11,500 with batteries and can be charged overnight from any power point.

It was unveiled by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, who said: "The idea is to get our cities cleaner, greener and safer. The only way to achieve it is for local authorities to act together to provide a mass market."

The "alter-europe" scheme was launched in Chester in April to replace city owned buses, refuse lorries, vans and cars. Eventually a date when participating centres will only be open to cleaner vehicles.

David Solman, Southwark's principal planning officer, said that by making all its fleet of 350 vehicles low-emission, it would improve local air quality and set an example to other road users.

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Lockerbie deal lures Libyans

Michael White and Gerard Seenan

THE FOREIGN Secretary's long-awaited plan to break the diplomatic impasse over the 1988 Lockerbie bombing led to cautious optimism on Monday that the two accused Libyans will be tried in The Hague next spring, under Scottish law.

In a move designed to make it harder for Colonel Muammar Gadafy to refuse extradition to a temporary Scots jurisdiction on Dutch soil, Robin Cook challenged the Libyan president and his allies in Africa and the Middle East to make good their repeated acceptance of a trial on neutral territory.

The new proposals amount to "the very terms which they themselves have said they would accept. I now urge Libya to respond quickly and without equivocation," said Mr Cook, whose crucial change-of-heart came seven years after Britain and the United States first insisted that Tripoli should hand over the two suspects.

After months of patient diplomacy, involving the US and Dutch governments — but not "directly or indirectly" the Libyans — the move delighted many of the families of the 270 victims, though others were wary.

Jim Swire, one of the most outspoken campaigners for justice, said he was "full of optimism" for a verdict, though only after further delays of perhaps two years.

In Washington, the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, conceded that the absence of progress in bringing the two suspects to trial meant that "the cause of justice was not being served".

The statement offered Libya both a carrot and a stick: the prospect of an early raising of extensive United Nations sanctions, in place since 1992, if it co-operated, or the threat that international support for sanctions would be redoubled, as Mr Cook predicted.

There was no immediate reaction from Libya. But Alistair Duff, the suspects' Scottish solicitor, said the fact that three Scottish judges, rather than an international panel, would try the case, was "not insurmountable".

Mr Duff said he had received a positive response from Ibrahim Legwell, the suspects' legal counsel in Tripoli. "But there are conditions that have to be met," said Mr Duff. "Where are the suspects going to be held in custody? Are they going to be guaranteed safe passage to, and in the event of an acquittal, from the trial? We have to be sure they are not going to be whisked away for trial elsewhere."

Monday's statements, accompanied by an Anglo-Dutch text covering details of the unprecedented procedure and a letter to UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, claim to have given all necessary assurances of safe conduct.

The Scottish Lord Advocate, Lord Hardie, suggested that the full trial could start by May, with the two prisoners being held in a "special facility" staffed by Scottish prison officers. It could last up to a year.

The suspects would first have been formally extradited to the Netherlands. But, as both Mr Cook and Lord Hardie made clear, it is still far from certain that Libya will hand over the two accused men, Abdel Baset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi and al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, who have always denied any involvement.

After one of the biggest criminal investigations in Scottish history, the pair, who were nominally working for Libyan Arab Airlines, were accused of planting the bomb in a suitcase on the doomed Boeing 747. It blew up in the baggage hold on Pan Am Flight 103 on December 21, 1988, killing all the passengers and 11 residents of Lockerbie.

Mr Cook called it "an act of premeditated mass murder and of evil terrorism". Asked whether Col Gadafy would use last week's US missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan to refuse co-operation, the Foreign Secretary said that was "a pretty threadbare argument".

Mr Cook said: "For years Libya has promised that it would accept a court without jury, meeting in a third country. That way forward is now open to them. It is a way forward that holds out lifting the hardship of sanctions on the people of Libya."

London sits near bottom of national murder league

Alan Travis

LONDON has one of the lowest murder rates in the world — even below such "well ordered" cities as Geneva and Copenhagen, according to a new international league table of homicides published by the Home Office last week.

The research firmly dispels the popular image of London's streets filled with serial killers who stalk the innocent and strike at the unwary for no reason.

Home Office research says that the British way of sudden death is more likely to be at the hands of someone the victim knows. Only in 4 per cent of murder cases did the suspect appear to be mentally disturbed and strike without apparent motive.

Those in greatest danger of being killed are babies under 12 months, usually by their parents, and males aged between 16 and 49, and not the pensioners and young women of media myth.

A study of the 711 murders, manslaughters and infanticides recorded in England and Wales last year shows that men were more likely to be killed with a sharp instrument, such as a knife, while women were more likely to die by strangling or suffocation.

Guns were used in only 8 per cent of murder cases. Suspects had been charged or convicted in all but about 9 per cent of killings last year.

In a league table of 29 European and North American cities, London's murder rate of only 2.1 per 100,000 population puts it in the bottom five. At the top of the list is Washington DC with a murder rate which is a terrifying 33 times that found in London. New York, where "zero tolerance" policing is supposed to have dramatically cut the violent crime rate, still suffers a murder rate which is eight times that of London.

The murder capital of Europe is Moscow with 18 killings per 100,000 population. Brussels is at the bottom of the league. Dublin, Rome and Athens also have a lower murder rate than London.

Murder rate

Average homicides* 1995-97 per 100,000 population in selected European and American** cities

City	Rate
Washington	65.3
Philadelphia	27.4
Dallas	24.8
Los Angeles	22.6
Moscow	18.1
New York City	16.2
Lisbon	9.7
Amsterdam	7.7†
Belfast	4.4
Geneva	4.2
Berlin	3.8
Paris	3.3
Helsinki	3.05
Stockholm	3.0
Prague	2.9
Edinburgh	2.4†
London	2.1
Dublin	1.9†
Rome	1.7
Athens	1.4
Brussels	0.4

*Murder, manslaughter and infanticide
** 1994-96; cities with over 1m inhabitants except Washington (0.54m)
† 1994-96

Source: Home Office

Flower power may help clear the dirt from nuclear age

Paul Brown

SCIENTISTS in radiation suits began harvesting dwarf sunflowers, spinach, sugar beet and Indian mustard last week next to an ageing nuclear reactor in Essex.

It is part of an experiment to see if plants that rapidly absorb radioactivity could be used to clear up contaminated ground far more cheaply and efficiently than traditional methods.

British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), which operates the 25-year-old Magnox reactor at Bradwell, believes it could save the digging up of hundreds of tons of contaminated soil and transporting it to Drigg in Cumbria for dumping. The idea also has potential for other industries to clear up toxic chemicals.

The soil in which the plants grew is contaminated with caesium 137 after water leaked from a rusty underground cooling system installed in the 1970s. It is the same isotope which caused problems after the Chernobyl accident when it appeared in sheep from farms in Cumbria and North Wales. They became unmarketable after they had eaten grass growing in the fall-out zone.

Bradwell health physicist Chris James said the bulk of the contaminated soil had been removed, and the company was investigating taking out more when BNFL's Berkeley laboratories asked if the site could be used as a test bed for a potentially far cheaper method.

The plants harvested last week will be taken to the laboratories in Gloucestershire where they will be tested to see which variety is most successful in collecting radioactivity. Soil tests will also be taken at Bradwell to see by how much the caesium 137 level has gone down.

Nets have been used to keep birds and insects away, and anti-rabbit fencing was put round the test garden.

The plants were all cut before they seeded to avoid returning radioactivity to the ground.

Robin Thornton, a BNFL spokesman, said: "The idea has tremendous potential because we have to close down our old nuclear stations, and our aim is to return them to greenfield sites. Obviously there will be contaminated soil, but it would be tremendously expensive and difficult to transport it all away to Cumbria. It is early days yet, but if we could find the right plants and best methods it would apply to different types of toxic materials and other contaminated sites."

Guards deny Fayed claims

THE former bodyguards of Diana, Princess of Wales, rejected claims this week by Mohamed Al Fayed that they were to blame for the crash that killed her and his son Dodi, *writes Sarah Hall.*

Trevor Rees-Jones, the only survivor of the accident, said he had done all he could to protect the couple, who died when their car crashed in a Paris underpass on August 31 last year.

Kes Wingfield, who was driving a decoy car at the time, said he was furious and saddened that Mr Fayed made the "outrageous and groundless suggestion".

The two men — who stopped working for the owner of Harrods earlier this year — were responding to his allegation made in the American issue of Time magazine that they had "caused the devastation and the accident through their incompetence and unprofessional practices".

He said: "They had the rules and they moved away from the rules. They let me down."

David Crawford, a solicitor for Mr Rees-Jones, said his client was "disappointed but not surprised" by the allegations.

One year on, page 13

In Brief

BBC Radio 4 has suffered a 10 per cent drop in the number of listeners during the past month. The fall follows a radical overhaul in the spring.

RETIRED Chief Supt David Duckenfield and former Supt Bernard Murray, the officers in charge of policing at the Hillsborough FA Cup semi-final in April 1989 which saw 96 Liverpool fans crushed to death, are to face a private prosecution in October for alleged neglect of public duty and unlawful killing.

AN OVERWHELMING majority of voters wants the Government to press ahead with its pre-election pledge to legislate to give a right to roam over open moorland and mountainside, according to an NOP poll conducted for the Ramblers' Association.

RICHARD JONES, who admitted stealing £60,000 from the evangelistic Morris Cerullo foundation, was jailed for 15 months at St Alban's crown court.

TRAFALGAR Square, in the heart of London, is to be given a £50 million facelift, including new pavements, trees and traffic-calming measures, such as banning vehicles from the north side of the square.

MOORFIELDS eye hospital in London hopes to restore the sight of a Kenyan teenager, Stanley Matuma, injured in the bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi.

FOUR disabled passengers on a week-long trip drowned when their canal boat snagged on part of a lock on the Leeds-Liverpool waterway at Gargrave and sank within minutes.

PETER DIMOND, aged 57, a pilot who helped the businessman Asil Nadir escape British justice, was jailed for two years after his conviction at the Old Bailey.

THREE boarding school teachers convicted of sexually abusing boys in their care were sentenced to a total of more than 35 years' jail. Nicholas Douglass, the prime mover in the child abuse ring involving 18 boys over an eight-year period, was jailed for 16 years.

POLICE are investigating the deaths of 20 patients of GP Harold Shipman, following the exhumation of the body of Kathleen Grundy, aged 81.

TWO of the four Spice Girls — Melanie Brown and Victoria Adams — are pregnant. Ms Adams will marry her boyfriend, footballer David Beckham, next year. Ms Brown also plans to marry her boyfriend, dancer Jimmy Gulzar.

Home Office aims to root out racism

Alan Travis

THE Home Secretary, Jack Straw, is to set ethnic recruitment targets and appoint harassment contact officers after a study revealed racism deeply entrenched in the Home Office.

Ministers have ordered the adoption of a 12-month race equality action plan for the very government department that is supposed to combat racism, after being shocked by the results of research this year into attitudes of the 10,700 Home Office staff.

Home Office managers, including some from the immigration service, said in focus groups: "If you're a racist it is a bloody good job"; "Nigerians are the worst thieves in the world. If a Nigerian said: 'Nice day' I'd go outside and check". The managers are also accused of engaging in bullying, racist banter and victimisation of black staff.

Ministers have told Home Office top management to undergo racial awareness and equal opportunities training. An equal opportunities complaints scheme is to be introduced and a racial harassment contact officer scheme brought in.

The research, undertaken by the MaST Consultancy Service for the Home Office personnel policy unit in March, concludes that the Home Office needs to demonstrate a "top-level commitment to racial equality". It reports immense scepticism among black staff interviewed that anything would be done about the results of the research. Managers have by default licensed a climate in which "inappropriate behaviour flourishes", the report adds.

Ethnic staff in the Home Office said that although the department had been officially committed to racial equality policies for more than a decade, the policy had yet to be translated into practice in any consistent fashion.

"Decisions concerning promotion, career moves, recruitment and appraisal are perceived to be 'clouded by prejudice'. There is a strong perception that selection is based on tokenism, nepotism, patronage, the 'old boys network' and the Home Office version of 'who is seen to fit in'," says the internal report. Black staff complained there were no black civil servants in the higher grades.

Some staff said managers only paid lip service to equal opportunities because ministers required it, and some managers were hostile when problems were raised.

The immigration service is singled out for particular criticism, but parts of the Home Office that have day-to-day contact with the public were also identified as areas of discrimination.

The Home Office permanent secretary, David Omand, said that the report "disclosed unacceptable behaviour by some employees towards ethnic minority colleagues". The findings show "our practice needs to improve considerably".

In a separate Home Office survey, black people feature disproportionately in arrest figures, which also suggests police may be more inclined to see black people's behaviour as suspicious.

More than half of all people arrested are unemployed and a similar percentage admit their guilt, according to the figures published last week. Around 15 per cent of those arrested are under 17 and nearly two-thirds have criminal convictions.

The survey found that members of ethnic minority groups who were arrested were less likely to confess, be cautioned or receive bail after a charge than white people.

Of those arrested in the sample of more than 4,000 in 10 police stations in England and Wales, 78 per cent were white, 13 per cent black and 6 per cent Asian. No further action was taken against 31 per cent of Asians, 25 per cent of black people and 21 per cent of white people.



Borcherds (left) and Gowers: 'It is remarkable for one country, let alone one institution, to win two medals'

Double first for Cambridge

John Carvel

TWO professors from Cambridge university were last week struggling to explain to a wider world the mysteries of moonshine conjecture and Banach spaces which won them Fields Medals — mathematics' equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Richard Borcherds and Tim Gowers were awarded two of the four medals at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Berlin. Only four British mathematicians have been honoured since the awards were established in 1936.

The medals, which are awarded every four years, are regarded as the highest international honour for mathematicians under 40 from all branches of the discipline.

"With such intense competition, it is remarkable for one country, let alone one institution to win two medals," said Prof John Coates, one of the judges.

The Cambridge professors did their undergraduate degrees and graduate training at Trinity College, but now work in different branches of the university's pure maths department.

Prof Borcherds, aged 38, was commended for "initiating a whole new field in the study of algebra, called vertex algebra". From his hotel room in Berlin last week, he explained that this had allowed him "to prove the moonshine conjectures about the monster simple group".

Most people could imagine a cube rotating in three-dimensional space and could work out that it had 24 different ways of rotating. Prof Borchard said he worked on the rotations of a theoretical snowflake in 196,883-dimensional space. "The total rotations are about equal to the number of atoms making up the Earth," he said.

Prof Borcherds said he was lucky to win an award that could have gone to 10 or 20 other leading mathematicians. "Some people who get a prize like this promptly stop doing anything. I'll have to make an effort to see that doesn't happen to me."

Professor Gowers, aged 34, was honoured for "spectacular applications of new combinatorial methods to solve problems in Banach spaces and probabilistic number theory".

Banach spaces — invented by the Polish mathematician Stefan Banach in the 1920s — are a series of stubborn puzzles, most of which have been solved during the past 60 years.

Cambridge university said Prof Gowers had solved the seemingly intractable hyperplane problem and the homogeneous spaces problem. He caught the eye of the Fields Medal judges with a new proof of a theorem by Endre Szemerédi, a Hungarian mathematician, that a sufficiently dense set of integers must contain arithmetic progressions of all lengths.

Prescott seeks scalp for failed rail privatisation

Keith Harper

THE Government may sack the rail regulator, John Swift, using him as the sacrificial lamb for a high-profile industry which is continuing to underperform and whose public image is perceived to have worsened since privatisation.

Government sources this week confirmed that ministers are still considering whether to renew Mr Swift's five-year contract due to expire in November. The final decision rests with the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to whom Mr Swift is answerable.

Mr Swift, a 57-year-old competition lawyer appointed by the Conservatives, has confirmed that he is still waiting for a decision. Mr Prescott, who is under growing pressure to make an example of the railways, could enjoy a short political coup by getting rid of Mr Swift.

Mr Prescott would like to plough ahead with new legislation to control the industry more effectively and to launch his strategic rail authority to provide the vision and planning it badly needs. He also wants to give passengers a better deal and an improved service — which official statistics show they are not getting. But Mr Prescott has so far failed to secure a positive assurance from the Prime Minister that a railways bill will be introduced in the new parliamentary session, beginning in October.

Mr Swift has not enjoyed a comfortable relationship with Mr Prescott. He has the authority to be much tougher with Railtrack, the private monopoly responsible for track and signalling which has quickly become one of the City's top performers. But he has been criticised for not insisting that Railtrack spends more on investment while its profits have risen consistently.

Railtrack's chairman, Sir Robert Horton, has batted away Mr Swift's threats of action by saying that it takes time to adjust from a nationalised industry into one free of public sector constraints.

Mr Swift has tried to endear himself to Mr Prescott by fining the 25 train operating companies for running an inferior telephone timetable service, but on other issues he has stepped back from using his already considerable powers.

Meanwhile John O'Brien, the rail franchise director, whose job will disappear when the strategic rail authority is set up, has suddenly adopted a tougher public role under instructions from Mr Prescott.

Mr O'Brien, who is supposed to ensure that the train companies provide the public with the best possible deal, last week ordered Chiltern Railways to pay back £2.5 million for defaulting on its services.

Other companies whose trains are regularly cancelled or severely delayed can expect similar ultimatums in the next few weeks.

Last week an Office of Passenger Rail Franchising survey showed growing consumer dissatisfaction with falling standards of service on the privatised rail network, and brought a furious reaction from Mr Prescott, who had increased Mr O'Brien's powers after last year's South West Trains débâcle. SWT, owned by Stagecoach, had cancelled hundreds of trains.

Ironically, Chiltern, owned by M40 Trains, a management and employee buy-out, is acknowledged by Mr O'Brien to have done much work to improve the railway.

Light shone on Nazi gold

Richard Norton-Taylor

A REPORT tracing the whereabouts of gold looted by the Nazis was this week hailed as shining light into dark corners.

The 800-page report documents submissions to the 42-nation conference held in London last December. The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, said it shed "a light in corners that had been kept dark for too long".

The report's author, Lord Mackay, the former Tory Lord Chancellor and the chairman of the conference, described it as a "unique collection of information". His report singles out the Vatican for refusing to open its records despite repeated requests.

"The Holy See delegation, which had made it clear from the outset that they were attending only as observers, did not respond," Lord Mackay says in the report. It is widely believed stolen gold was laundered by the Nazis through the Vatican.

The Holocaust Educational Trust said it was hopeful there might be progress on the Vatican archives. A trustee, Lord Hunt of Wirral, described a meeting with the Vatican in July as "most positive and helpful".

Lord Mackay said papers from the Tripartite Gold Commission — set up by Britain, France and the United States in 1946 to distribute Nazi gold seized by the Allies — would be made public in the next few weeks.

The conference helped to pave the way for funds for Holocaust victims and their heirs and this month's deal whereby Swiss banks agreed to pay $1.25 billion to Holocaust survivors. A separate international fund, set up by Britain last year, has received donations of £36 million, £1 million given by Britain.

The World Jewish Congress told the conference the Nazis looted at least £519 million in gold from 1933 to 1945 — £5.3 billion in today's prices. A follow-up conference, mainly on stolen works of art, is due in Washington in November.

Meanwhile the Foreign Office is investigating claims that during the war Britain confiscated Jewish assets worth up to £400 million today that were invested in Palestine and seized under "trading with the enemy" laws.

Blair prepares anti-terrorist package

Guardian Reporters

TONY BLAIR this week announced counter-terrorism measures to match last week's crackdown by the Irish government.

Senior ministers agreed to seek a two-day recall of Parliament next week to underline their determination to match the Dublin government's commitment to root out the rump of militant Irish republicanism in the wake of the Omagh bombing.

Though Whitehall believes that Dublin is, for the most part, "catching up" with Britain's anti-terrorist legislation, the Government plans to borrow the Irish practice of convicting suspects of belonging to a banned organisation solely on the word of a senior police officer.

Most of the measures the Irish government said it would introduce last week are already enshrined in Britain's Prevention of Terrorism Act and the 1996 PTA (Additional Powers Act), which gives the police wide-ranging powers to arrest, detain, question, stop and search.

The power to imprison suspects for being members of a proscribed terrorist organisation on the sworn evidence of a single senior police officer will not need a change in primary legislation, Downing Street suggested. The Northern Ireland Office confirmed that the Real IRA, a republican splinter group, was already such a proscribed organisation.

The attack in Omagh and those on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzani are likely to speed up proposals for new, permanent anti-terrorist legislation originally designed primarily to combat members of international terrorist groups based in Britain.

Last weekend, a week after the Omagh bomb, the Irish National Liberation Army announced it was ending its 23-year campaign of violence.

It was responsible for about 100 killings, including many of its members murdered in internal feuding. In 1979 the INLA assassinated Airey Neave, the shadow Northern Ireland secretary, at Westminster, and just after Christmas last year shot dead the Loyalist Volunteer Force leader, Billy Wright, in Belfast's Maze prison.

Mr Blair, who was due to visit Belfast this week, said that he hoped the 28 deaths at Omagh would prove to be the "final horrific event" of 29 years of the Troubles.

But the Irish prime minister, Bertie Ahern, warned that such hopes were misplaced. He said: "I'd love to say that I believe this is the last event, as I would have loved to say it on a number of past events.

"But I think there is a small element — and they are small — who do not share that feeling. They believe that they have some kind of a mandate from some period in history that gives them some right to do this. Of course they have not."

Mr Ahern also predicted that the IRA would be able to move on beyond "a lot of the rhetoric of the past and the harsh words", and decommission its weapons, as agreed, in the next two years.

Mr Ahern coupled the remark with a reference to the need "to talk about demilitarisation in an overall sense". This term is usually a coded phrase for withdrawal of British troops, and the comment alarmed some Unionists.

Given his unqualified support last week for the United States' bombing suspected terrorist targets, Mr Blair also surprised MPs on both sides of the Ulster debate in an article for the Observer when he ruled out using the SAS to "take out" terrorists. "We must win the argument by democratic means," he explained.

Labour MP Tam Dalyell asked: "There are terrorists in Dundalk. Should we bomb Dundalk, or Norald in New York?"

Unionist MPs are suspicious of government rhetoric for the opposite reason. Peter Robinson, of the Democratic Unionist Party, warned that both London and Dublin would miss a vital opportunity if they did not impose tougher measures while both communities were outraged by the Omagh bomb. "Support for such action will not be there for long," he said.

● The Queen is to lead mourners at a service in memory of the victims of the bombing. The Duke of Edinburgh and the Prime Minister will also attend the service. The date and venue are yet to be finalised.

Comment, page 12

Anger as Real IRA confesses

John Mullin

THE Real IRA provoked yet more anger in Northern Ireland last week when it finally confessed to the Omagh bombing, claiming it delivered three clear telephone warnings 40 minutes before the car bomb exploded, killing 28.

The hardline republican terrorists apologised "to the civilians" but attempted to blame the security forces for the worst single atrocity in 30 years of the Troubles. It denied that there had been an attempt to mislead the police and so cause widespread carnage.

The Real IRA, linked to the 32-County Sovereignty Committee, based in Dundalk in the Irish Republic, indicated that the Royal Ulster Constabulary had failed to clear the Co Tyrone town centre despite adequate notice of where the device had been planted. The target was commercial premises.

Although there was an apology, there was also a chilling signal that the Real IRA would continue with its terror campaign. It spoke of an "ongoing" war against the British.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, reacted with undisguised fury. She said: "It is a pathetic attempt to apologise for and excuse mass murder. It is contemptible and it is an insult to the people of Omagh."

The Real IRA's call was made to the office of the Irish News, Northern Ireland's nationalist morning newspaper. The caller said: "Despite media reports, it was not our intention at any time to kill any civilians. It was a commercial target, part of an ongoing war against the Brits. We offer apologies to the civilians."

Ulster Television immediately rejected the claims about the warnings. It said that the two calls it received did indicate the bomb was outside the courthouse, and had made no mention of commercial premises.

Thousands take to the streets of Omagh last weekend to mourn friends and relatives lost to the bomb PHOTOGRAPH: LOUISA BULLER



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Vengeance is not the answer

ANSWERING bombs with bombs is a luxury only the world's sole superpower can afford. Even so it may come at a high price, as is rapidly becoming clear in the wake of last week's cruise missile raids in Afghanistan and Sudan. Part of this price is that such acts of retaliation are counter-productive, immediately so for hapless foreigners who may be kidnapped or shot at, and potentially so in provoking more terrorist attacks. More serious still, such acts undermine the consensus for a global rule of law which the United States asserts directly and through the United Nations. They also put great strain on the collective authority of the world's largest nations acting through the UN Security Council. These are familiar objections, though they do not carry less weight for being so. The question is whether Washington's case is so overwhelming in this instance as to outweigh these strong arguments against.

Let us discount, at least for the sake of argument, the Monica factor. The US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, had already warned after the Nairobi embassy bombing, in unusually strong terms, that the US would respond at a time and place of its choosing. Intelligence gathering and planning were well under way before Mr Clinton testified to the grand jury last week. It does not help, of course, that the action he authorised can be seen as an attempt to restore presidential gravitas — and will be pilloried as such by satirists around the world. But Washington has acted unilaterally before, and will do so again.

The raids are justified by the US first on legal grounds of "self-defence". Certainly the UN charter grants nations that right in the event of an "armed attack". But Article 51 was intended for situations where the state in question is in imminent danger, and where the Security Council has not yet had time to act. If every country claimed the right to hit back when terrorists strike in a third country, the world would soon descend into anarchy.

The second justification is more pragmatic — that the US counter-raids will deter terrorists from further action. This is far from evident. If a high-level conclave of international terrorists was about to take place at Osama bin Laden's Afghan hide-out, would it not have been more productive to monitor it for intelligence purposes rather than frighten them away? Potential terrorists are more likely to be goaded than deterred by such attacks: significantly, US officials did not deny that their citizens are now at higher risk around the world as a result of the strikes.

The bin Laden network is now portrayed as Terrorist Threat No 1 — a position variously occupied in the past by Syria, Iran, Libya and North Korea. There will be new candidates in the future. Never mind that bin Laden himself emerged from the Afghan fundamentalist hot-pot which the US stirred up in its covert war against the Soviet Union there. We are accustomed by now to such historical ironies. The point is that nominating a Terrorist of the Year is no solution. Terrorism has to be fought by a variety of means, including some that are covert, but these will never succeed unless accompanied by a political strategy addressing the causes of terrorism. These have much more to do with poverty, unemployment, injustice and the deprivation of rights than with a fundamentalist enmity for the Great Satan. Real statesmanship for Mr Clinton (and a real escape from domestic troubles) should lie in tackling these problems, and most of all in the Middle East.

From horror to hope in Ireland

FOR the second time in as many months an atrocity designed to drive a stake through the heart of the Irish peace process appears to have achieved exactly the opposite result. Last month the loyalists who burned three children to death in Ballymoney created such a wave of revulsion among ordinary unionists that they broke the back of the Drumcree protests and decisively isolated the most backward wing of Orangeism. Now the massacre perpetrated by the Real IRA in Omagh — a bombing intended to cut the political ground from beneath both Gerry Adams and David Trimble — has left the splinter group's leaders running for cover in the face of hostility and rage from both the republican mainstream and the wider nationalist population.

It was difficult to discern much hope amid the misery of the burials of the Omagh innocents last week. But the plea from Archbishop Sean Bradley, leader of the Catholic Church in Ireland, that the victims of the Omagh slaughter should not be allowed to have died in vain may turn out to be more than the wishful thinking it might have been in earlier years.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, inevitably poured scorn on the Real IRA's hurried announcement of a "suspension of military operations". But the faction's chaotic U-turn is an unmistakable sign of the sea-change in the politics of the North wrought by the Good Friday agreement.

There is no doubt that republican leaders have put intense pressure on the breakaway group — the Sinn Fein chairman, Mitchel McLaughlin, admitted in a cautious statement that there had been "contact" through intermediaries — in an effort to bring the recalcitrants to heel. The same arm-twisting now needs to be applied to the other rejectionist factions. But just as important has been what David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist party, called the "deafening" popular condemnation and revulsion across Ireland.

The combination of the two is what has driven Michael McKevitt of the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (directly linked to the Real IRA) and his partner, Bernadette Sands-McKevitt — sister of the legendary republican hunger-striker, Bobby Sands — to flee their home in Dundalk and escape the fury of their own people. During three decades of conflict neither republican nor loyalist paramilitary leaders have ever had to face the indignity of the threats and home protests being visited on the McKevitts.

That is a measure of both the strength of cross-community support for the Good Friday agreement and the political and military weakness of the opposition groups, masked by the unprecedented scale and horror of the August 15 bombing. That does not mean there will be an end to the outrages. But the republican movement, bolstered by its carefully nurtured democratic mandate, shows no signs of splitting, as it did so fatefully in the early 1920s and 1970s. Paradoxically, the worst carnage of Northern Ireland's troubles has only served to emphasise the solid foundations of the political process constructed to bring them to an end.

War on the poor

DEBT cripples, debt kills, debt destroys lives and places, and debt denies hope of better tomorrows. We can only conclude from observing world leaders in the past three months that the International Monetary Fund, other banks and national politicians actively want to continue the mindless exploitation of the world's most vulnerable people and further a scandal that now beggars belief.

Since the Guardian joined Jubilee 2000 in May to press for faster and deeper debt cancellation in the most impoverished countries by 2000, the debt burden has continued to grow, and the poorest countries now owe the richest a mind-numbing $2 billion. It is modern slavery.

In the past year $45 billion has been found to bail out private corporations and governments caught up in the Southeast Asia crisis, yet next to nothing has gone to help the people who most need health care and education. Japan, Germany and Italy have actually tried to obfuscate the issues, opposed proposals to provide earlier and deeper relief, and pressed for the latest possible dates to write off debt. They may well, as Oxfam accused them last week, be guilty of violating United Nations commitments to children. Only Norway has had the courage to act unilaterally. It is not good enough. If ending this outrage means breaking ranks with economic allies, then so be it.

There are 500 days to go to the new millennium. History will record that Britain and the richest countries declared war on the poorest people in the world in the late 20th century and then, knowing the impact, stood by as millions died and suffered for their greed. The next chance to put debt on the agenda is in Washington next month at the IMF/World Bank annual meetings. Both the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, and the International Development Secretary, Clare Short, are expected to be there. They should bang heads together and, if that fails, signal that Britain will act with moral authority and go it alone.

The stakes keep rising in the war on terrorism

Paul Rogers

IN ALL the 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland the deliberate mass killing of civilians has been relatively rare. Before the Omagh bomb there were some exceptions, notably the loyalist bombs in Dublin and Monaghan in 1974, which killed 30 people, and the Birmingham pub bombings later that year. There have also been many instances of random shootings, and innumerable examples of people being caught up in attacks intended for others.

Mass murder has rarely served the political purposes of Northern Ireland paramilitaries, proving all too often to be counter-productive to their political aims. If it is proved that the Omagh massacre had this aim, it would plumb new depths in the conflict. It would also be a rare example of such an attack in the wider world, where political violence is once again developing as a major force in international relations.

The death toll in the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings were directed specifically at United States interests, as have been many attacks throughout the Middle East, notably in Lebanon in the 1980s and more recently in Saudi Arabia.

Most non-state paramilitaries have specific strategies and tactics, and are frequently conservative in their methods, concentrating on particular actions, whether these be bombing, shooting, assassination, kidnapping or even knee-capping.

Even so, there are two trends in political violence that are becoming clear, and they do have major implications for the future. The first is economic targeting — the use of bombs and other weapons to attack the weak points in a modern industrial state so as to maximise the economic damage.

The most sustained example of this was the Provisional IRA campaign in Britain, both before and after the 1994 ceasefire. Two bombs in the City of London, repeated disruption of road and rail services, and attacks on electricity and gas supplies were early examples, followed later by Canary Wharf, Manchester and further motorway and rail disruption during the 1997 general election campaign. The London bombings, in particular, caused huge concern in financial and political circles, besides costing about $3 billion. They, and the other economic targeting, undoubtedly prompted the Major government to search harder for a peace settlement.

Economic targeting is likely to be an increasingly used tool of paramilitary groups, but the other trend is even more ominous — the willingness of some groups to attempt systematically to cause huge loss of life. Sometimes the two aims coincide: the Tamil Tiger attack on the Sri Lanka Central Bank in Colombo in January 1996 was intended to destroy the commercial heart of the city, but it also killed nearly 100 people and injured 1,400. Similarly, the Aum Shinrikyo nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system a few months earlier aimed to kill thousands of people and scare the population away from the mass transit system, with potentially devastating economic consequences.

The Tokyo attack failed in its main aim — the nerve agent was impure, the dispersal ineffective and only 12 people died, although 5,000 were affected. There have been similar "failures" with other recent incidents. In December 1994 an Air France Airbus was hijacked by a militant Algerian group intending to crash the plane on Paris, killing themselves, the passengers and many people on the ground. They failed because a French commando unit stormed the plane at Marseille and killed the hijackers.

Perhaps the most indicative incident of all was the New York World Trade Centre bombing in 1993. Six people died and more than 1,000 were injured, but this was again an attack that failed in its real aim. The bomb was placed in an underground car park and was intended to collapse the 110-storey North Tower over the Vista Hotel and into the South Tower. If it had succeeded the death toll would have been more than 30,000, the worst single attack since the bombing of Nagasaki nearly 30 years earlier.

These examples show that there are circumstances in which mass killing is the specific aim. The fact that they did not achieve their intended results should not disguise the risks now becoming apparent.

The real change in all of this is still to come — the likely development and use of biological weapons by paramilitary groups. Iraq's remarkable ability to develop and deploy several different kinds of biological weapon in the late 1980s demonstrates that this is a technology that has already proliferated. At some stage, and probably quite soon, it is likely to be used.

A US military strategist, Roger Barnett, has commented that one of the main threats to Western power is "the impact of high-technology weapons and weapons of mass destruction on the ability — and thus the willingness — of the weak to take up arms against the strong". If he is right, then just as the US and its allies believe that they have become the dominant players in international security, they may actually be losing control.

Even so, Western responses seek typically to protect the most important targets and destroy the paramilitary groups responsible. Whether this is in any sense possible remains to be seen, though the process will certainly give plenty of work to the plethora of terrorism experts who currently grace our airwaves.

Perhaps a better course of action would be to begin to pay attention to the root causes of insecurity, those conditions of society, especially the deepening wealth-poverty divide, which are dispossessing millions of people and inciting some to extreme and devastating action.

The Omagh bomb arose out of the specific circumstance of generations of sectarian division, but elsewhere in the world, political violence is massively encouraged by systematic marginalisation. If the Omagh bomb is ultimately a result of a failure to heal the divided society of Northern Ireland, then the much larger risks we face from extreme paramilitary action in the world at large will stem mainly from our failure to address endemic injustice.

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One year on, has Britain changed?

When Princess Diana died last summer, Britain looked in the mirror and was startled by what it saw. By **Andrew Marr**


Liberty leading the PEOPLE. after the painting by Eugéne Delacroix

SHE DIED. It was an accident. Half the nation went, temporarily, a little mad. But was it really that banal? Think back to that late-summer convulsion when the starkness of Diana's death folded into scenes of spontaneous mass-mourning on the hot streets of London, accompanied by equally heated debates about the future of the monarchy and the true nature of the British people. Looking back, do we recognise ourselves? Are we, on reflection, just a little embarrassed? The hyperbolic predictions of a crisis in the state... already, it seems grainy, time-lapsed, not quite real: vignettes from Bonkersville-on-Thames.

There has been nothing stranger in our lifetimes. The unforgettable smell of millions of flowers rotting in Cellophane. The wobbliness of a tough female reporter coming back into her office to explain that many apparently sane people were seeing a vision of Diana in a portrait of Charles I at St James's Palace. The little shrines of candles and hand-made cards and teddy bears, making the avenues of the old imperial capital suddenly feel like Naples or Benares. City types weeping in tube trains. Middle-aged ladies in Marks & Spencer jackets spitting their contempt for the House of Windsor.

Or, what about this: at the service in Westminster Abbey, watching the swaying mass of lilies on the coffin, army officers in spurs trying to decide the right expression to wear while listening to Elton John singing "Candle in the Wind"; that keening noise when the coffin had left Kensington Palace; the hailstorm of bouquets from motorway bridges as the hearse accelerated north.

This wasn't simply a little odd. Put Salvador Dali, Derek Jarman and Cecil B De Mille on acid and set them to work with a Spielberg-sized budget, and they wouldn't have come up with anything as weird as the events of a year ago.

First things first. It wasn't "got up" by the press. It was real, and unchoreographed, including the anger about the royal family's apparent initial coldness, their refusal to participate. The evidence sits there, on videotape, in diaries and family albums.

But neither was it fully a national event. Yes, the whole country watched the funeral on television — nearly 90 per cent claimed to have done so, according to one poll. So did a sizeable swathe of the planet. But the special feeling of the crowd, with its mingling of grief and subversive, anger, belonged to London. Like the French Revolution, this event was parochial to the capital and much of the rest of the nation was slow to understand it.

Millions of people outside the metropolis looked at the TV news or read their papers and felt strangers in their own country, remote observers of mass hysteria. They couldn't believe it, and wrote to the media telling them so.

But they were wrong, and people on the streets were right. Something had changed in the country, and the reaction to Diana's death crystallised it. More so than the general election a few months earlier, it was in that over-worked phrase, a moment of truth.

And the truth is? What is real is that, with Diana's death, Britain suddenly stared at itself in the mirror and didn't quite recognise the face looking back. No longer was the expression tight-lipped, white, and drawn with reticence. Diana was the queen of another country, a multicultural, more liberal and emotionally open Britain, the patron saint of the pierced people who are all around us. It took the shock of death to give her that iconic status for good, safe from the corrosion of events. That's what sudden death can do (imagine the glow in which Tony Blair would be remembered had he collapsed, heroically, in Downing Street on May 1 last year).

So, if you seek her monument, look around. Diana-land is real enough. On the down side, it is a populist, schmaltzy, credulous place, with little sense of history. More Oprah than opera.

The old Roman virtues of endurance, deference, understatement and dignity in public are dying out. Many people, particularly older people, mourn them. The stiff upper lip, the phlegmatic belief in coping, the buttoned-up stoicism, all the things Prince Charles exemplifies, were once not the outdated fashion of the ruling class, or only male virtues, but a visible part of the national character. But that's gone. It is disappearing, along with the coldness and hypocrisy for which the English were famous.

It isn't just the British weather that's getting warmer and wilder. We are becoming less Victorian, and more like the insubordinate, flashy, demonstrative people of an earlier Britain, except that the tolerance, openness and diversity of the new Britain makes it a happier place to live in.

Let me repeat: Diana didn't cause this. She was a force of nature, but hardly El Niño. She was only a symbol of social changes happening already, a political symbol because of her royal fate and her choice of charities, friends, words and gestures. With her emotional fragility and self-revelation, her baseball caps, natural lack of deference, hedonistic enjoyment of material things and her complicated sex life, she was representative of the new, emerging Britain just as surely as Charles and his mother represent an old nation.

That meant the anger at royal coldness, or the reactive disdain for Diana "hysteria" felt by millions, was also an argument between the generations, a debate not simply about a single troubled family but the country. Not that the British monarchy is about to collapse. A recent Guardian poll shows 28 per cent of people thinking Britain would be better off without the monarchy, and 52 per cent the opposite — hardly overwhelming enthusiasm for the institution.

Had she lived would a marriage to Dodi have dragged Princess Diana into the jetset world and dirtied her saintly image?

Yet the Queen, whose own approval rating still beats those of Tony Blair and Prince Charles, is a tough woman with a strong sense of history. She knows it has been a bad passage for the Firm. She understands, at some level, that the chilly formality that is their emblem now repels many people. But she is also aware that the monarchy has been unpopular before — Queen Victoria went through a bad patch, and the 1930s Abdication crisis led to predictions as doomy as those of 1997 — but has always bounced back.

In this case, she listened to the urgent messages from No 10, offering her the publicity antennae and smoothness of the Blair operation, and whatever she thought privately, she made public obeisance to the Diana cult. The lonely walk of the young princes behind the coffin made them untouchable in the public affection, and they are now the monarchy's trump cards. The Civil List restrictions are a good example of strategic retreat.

But it is too early to be conclusive. Charles is liked less and blamed more (as in the recent book by Julie Burchill, panned by the critics but a rompingly enjoyable polemic against Charles and his relatives). He proclaims himself modern. He says interesting things about the environment. But he looks no more like a monarch as he ages. His sorrow has not made him more dignified.

There is still heavy public hostility to Camilla Parker Bowles; that same Mori poll reported that half the respondents thought he shouldn't become king if he married her. He is famously a ditherer and he may well shrink from doing the decent thing. But as a visceral republican, I think there is probably enough residue of exasperated affection for him to make it to the throne, even with Camilla at his side. The opinion polls are turning slowly but clearly his way.

I say probably because the British state is at such a difficult, unpredictable pass already. Scottish independence, the Northern Irish settlement, the euro and voting reform are just some of the unfathomable shadows ahead. The British empire is finally dead. You'd be a fool today to proclaim that any aspect of the current Establishment was secure. So all we can say is that Diana's death shook the monarchy, leaving it weaker, with unpredictable consequences.

Had she lived, it is impossible to know what effect she would have had. Would she have been more of a danger to the Establishment, as the conspiracy theorists insist, demonstrating a sparkling daily alternative to the dour and self-pitying Windsors, as she grew in confidence and spoke out more? Would her sons have been more open? Or would a marriage to Dodi have dragged her increasingly into the jet-set world and dirtied her saintly image? Her brother, after all, said she was ready to quit Britain for good.

At the time Polly Toynbee wrote that "we are infantilised by our obsession with this meaningless family and their myths ... It demeans them. It demeans us. The anger of the people on the streets against the monarchy may be unfair, but perhaps it will at last break the spell and set us all free."

So far, it hasn't. The weight of habit hangs so very heavy. Harry and William are treated with the same gooey fascination as their lost parent. The same papers that pushed their circulations with Diana, mingling intrusion and unctuous advice, are goggling at the princes, because that is what their readers want. How many of people who were stricken with remorse at their own voyeuristic habits and the paparazzi profits therefrom, really did give up buying that daily tabloid, or glossy magazine? Precious few. Habit, again. The press code has been tightened but the world feels similar.

So where else can we look for signs of change, for lasting significance? The clearest example of political legacy is the early passage of the bill ratifying the anti-landmine Ottawa Convention, which passed through the Commons last month, after a campaign to get the job done before the first anniversary of Diana's death. But the treaty was the achievement of the United Nations, the Red Cross, the Canadian government and the International Campaign to Ban Land-mines, which won the Nobel Peace Prize last October. Diana was an invaluable publicist for the campaign.

I look around for hard examples of Britain AD (after Diana) and they are elusive. The greater emotional openness and American or even Catholic demonstrativeness that anyone must notice, has its roots in cultural, media and social changes over many years. The greater self-confidence and unabashed material ambition of many young women is also the product of far vaster forces than a discarded princess. But the shift of tone is here for good.

Her death provided the shock, the disruption to the everyday, which allowed for communal self-recognition — that moment when we stared at the crowds and bouquets, stared at ourselves, and thought, bloody hell, so that's what we're like. It offered, in the proper sense, a moment of national reflection. And because to know oneself is to change, then a year on, yes, it is safe to say that Diana's death changed the country.

Victim of free-market Bolsheviks

The shock treatment that was meant to save Russia has brought it to death's door, writes **Larry Elliott**

THE collapse of the Soviet Union was a sweet moment for the West. All those years of the cold war, of being worried about the Red Army goose-stepping into West Germany were suddenly and spectacularly over. Like all victors in wars, the West had the chance to be generous or vindictive. And like nearly all victors, it made the wrong choice.

At the end of A People's Tragedy, his monumental study of the Russian Revolution, historian Orlando Figes warned that "it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the emerging civil societies of the former Soviet bloc will seek to emulate the democratic model. This is no time for the sort of liberal-democratic triumphalism with which the collapse of the Soviet Union was met in many quarters in the West."

Sadly, that is precisely what has happened — an attempt to transform a command economy into a pure market economy overnight.

But this, remember, was the end of the 1980s. Mrs Thatcher was in her pomp, the economies of the West were enjoying a boom, the doctrines of Milton Friedman were being followed everywhere.

As such, the Lenins of laissez-faire believed that they could short-circuit the historical process. They were wrong. Free-market Bolshevism has taken Russia to the edge of the abyss.

Since 1990 the Russian economy has shrunk by more than 40 per cent as most of the country's woefully inefficient industry has been wiped out by foreign competition. Output of lorries, for example, is down by more than 80 per cent, that of fridges and freezers by more than 70 per cent. The Great Leap Forward to a market economy has put the state finances under extreme pressure. The failure to pay wages has become so acute that teachers have gone on strike and the country has lapsed back into a barter economy, making it difficult to collect taxes — even for the baseball-bat wielding, balaclava-clad heavies sent in by the government to persuade those in arrears to pay up.

For those visitors taking snaps of St Basil's Cathedral, this gloomy picture may seem at odds with the outward signs of Western prosperity. But as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) admits: "The vitality displayed in . . . Moscow City has certainly nurtured some casual travellers' impressions that Russia as a whole must have done likewise. So far, however, the areas enjoying a sustained upswing are best described as growth islands."

At the same time as the country is suffering from levels of economic deprivation that would be deemed intolerable in the West, an attempt is being made to implant democracy.

The two — breakneck economic transition and democracy — are incompatible, even though this seems to have escaped those in the West who are now accusing Moscow of bringing the crisis on itself. In the same way, presumably, as a laboratory rat brings cancer upon itself by inhaling cigarette smoke.

Critics of the West's approach to



Crisis? What crisis? . . . Boris Yeltsin meets sausage factory workers just days before the rouble was devalued, causing mayhem in the Russian economy and on international markets

Russia, including the financier George Soros, argue that the process has been far too fast. He says it was obvious from the start that there needed to be something akin to a Marshall plan for Russia to embed the reform process, and that capital mobility and free trade were likely to be self-defeating for an economy as weak and vulnerable as Russia's.

Soros argues, rightly, that Western assistance to Russia has gone through three phases. "In the first phase, we should have offered assistance, but we didn't. In the second phase, we promised it, but we didn't deliver it. In the third phase, we delivered, but it didn't work."

And so, for all the claims from the disciples of pure laissez-faire that the shock treatment was paying off, the Russian government was faced earlier this month with a situation in which gross domestic product had resumed its decline, with lower oil prices and the global slowdown emanating from Asia leading to a contraction in both May and June.

Weak growth plus high debt servicing costs threatened the authorities with a potentially calamitous explosion in external debt, while the austere monetary and fiscal measures required to underpin the rouble simply added to rumbling social unrest, thereby making long-term economic reforms even more difficult.

Faced with the choice between the domestic economy and defending the currency, the Yeltsin government chose the former, as did John Major on Black Wednesday. This was sensible, even though there are those who say that the hard-earned gains in the battle to bring down inflation have been tossed away. Given the disinflationary forces at play, both in the Russian and the global economy, this looks as dubious a proposition as it was in Britain in September 1992.

The speculators say that Russia is heading up a blind alley and may be cutting itself off from foreign investment. But what investment? According to the OECD, investment is running at 25 per cent of its 1990 level and the average age of plant and machinery is more than 14 years, compared with 9.5 years in 1980. Indeed, Moscow would be well advised to treat the advice of foreign investors with caution. Altruism is not readily associated with speculators, and they seem a bit miffed that the Russian authorities have wearied of being taken for a ride.

As one analyst put it last week: "The measures announced [last week] have effectively robbed the speculators of the air they need to breathe. The Russian government has clearly distinguished the needs of the real economy from that of the paper economy. It has exercised its right as a sovereign power to make the rules of the game."

If this is so, it may prove to be a decisive moment. The Russians seem to have stumbled upon a basic premise of the Bretton Woods system — namely that if you have a pegged exchange rate and total capital mobility, you have effectively ceded control of your economy to the speculators abroad and the mafia bosses at home.

One way out of the crisis would be a currency board, under which a country effectively stops having its own autonomous monetary policy and instead adopts that of another nation. To the extent that it would make economic policy more transparent, a currency board would help to rebuild the power and integrity of the state.

But Russia's real need is not a stable currency, but a growing economy. Given its vulnerability to commodity prices, it would be better off with a fixed but adjustable exchange rate coupled with controls on capital, perhaps along the lines of those in Chile, where long-term direct investment is welcomed, but short-term flows are penalised. This runs the risk of making the current epidemic of corruption even worse, but this is not a situation in which there are cost-free options.

There will be those who say that there is nothing wrong with Russia that more free trade, greater capital mobility and even more financial orthodoxy cannot put right. Russia, so the orthodoxy goes, has to seize the moment, even if the objective conditions for a market revolution are not absolutely in place.

Meanwhile, during the transition period, there will be a dictatorship of the bond dealers. This approach has been tried once in Russia, with well-documented results. It is in the West's own interests to cut Russia some slack, to recognise that Moscow needs time to muddle through for a bit. For as traders in dealing rooms last week could testify, the Russian menace still threatens the West, even if the Red Army does not.

Bonds provide safe haven

INVESTORS, panicked by falling stock markets and currency devaluations, are piling into the world's top bond markets, seeking safety, not high returns, *writes Mark Milner*.

German bunds, United States treasuries and British gilts are among the top targets for investors looking for "safe havens" from the storms that have been sweeping the international financial markets.

"Investors are minimising risks rather than maximising returns," said Alison Cottrell at London's PaineWebber.

As a result yields — the return on bonds — have fallen to near-record lows as demand outstrips supply.

Though bond yields rose on Monday as equity markets rallied, the succession of crises that have racked financial markets — from Asia last year to the most recent crisis in Russia — is likely to keep investors keen on the big bond markets.

Safe haven status is not their only attraction, however. Inflation, the *bête noire* of bond market investors, is relatively low in the economies with attractive bond markets.

But some analysts are concerned that if the safety-first mentality takes too strong a grip on investors, it may become more difficult and more expensive for less-favoured borrowers to tap the markets.

In Brief

BRITISH Airways broke the mould by signing a deal worth around $3.2 billion for an order of new planes from Airbus Industrie, the European manufacturer, which fought off competition from Boeing, its American rival and BA's usual supplier, to secure the contract.

A GROUP of war-torn African countries is to be offered an 11th-hour chance to join a special debt-relief programme, under a provision to be tabled by the World Bank at its annual meeting next month.

CHINA is to slash coal production by 200 million tonnes in response to the global economic crisis. The move will throw tens of thousands of workers on to the country's swollen dole queue or a subsistence existence on the land.

INTEL, the world's largest manufacturer of electronic chips, is to make a belated entry into the low-end personal computer market with a range of circuits for PCs that cost less than $1,000.

PHYTOPHARM, a small Cambridge drug company which creates drugs from plant extracts, signed a multi-million-dollar deal with Pfizer, the maker of Viagra, to develop a product to treat obesity.

THE Japanese government denied reports that it would use public funds to rescue floundering merger talks between Sumitomo Trust and the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan.

A CRIPPLING three-month strike at Korea's largest carmaker, Hyundai, ended with an agreement to axe the jobs of 277 factory workers, only one sixth of the staff originally earmarked for redundancy.

THE UK government was celebrating as inflation edged back towards its target after the first drop in the prices of high street goods for more than 25 years.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates August 24	Sterling rates August 17
Australia	2.8259-2.8299	2.7268-2.7306
Austria	20.71-20.73	20.39-20.40
Belgium	60.67-60.72	59.71-59.82
Canada	2.5368-2.5392	2.4628-2.4650
Denmark	11.20-11.22	11.03-11.04
France	9.86-9.87	9.71-9.72
Germany	2.9436-2.9466	2.8961-2.9005
Hong Kong	12.69-12.70	12.52-12.53
Ireland	1.1720-1.1768	1.1542-1.1583
Italy	2,903-2,905	2,858-2,861
Japan	235.63-235.93	235.61-235.90
Netherlands	3.3193-3.3219	3.2682-3.2714
New Zealand	3.3279-3.3345	3.2109-3.2169
Norway	12.82-12.83	12.33-12.34
Portugal	301.33-301.65	296.46-296.97
Spain	249.81-250.03	245.87-246.09
Sweden	13.49-13.51	13.20-13.22
Switzerland	2.4590-2.4618	2.4290-2.4320
USA	1.6390-1.6399	1.6159-1.6169
ECU	1.4909-1.4927	1.4699-1.4717

FTSE 100 Share index up 59.8 at 5559.7. FTSE 250 index down 50.6 at 5056.0. Gold up $0.25 at $284.75.

Taliban Hosts Tell of Shadowy Figure

Pamela Constable in Quetta

OSAMA BIN LADEN, the Saudi-born Islamic militant whose terrorist network was the target of U.S. military strikes last week in central Afghanistan, has spent the past 15 months living about 200 miles south of the site of the attacks, using as his base a fortified and heavily guarded hilltop compound outside the city of Kandahar.

A spokesman for the Taliban, the fundamentalist Islamic movement that now controls virtually all of Afghanistan, said that bin Laden was not injured in the U.S. military strike. The spokesman did not say where bin Laden was during the raid, only that he "is safe and no damage has been done to any of his companions."

As recently as Friday last week, bin Laden reportedly appeared at a mosque in downtown Kandahar for prayer services. Two Taliban militia members encountered on the streets of Quetta — 120 miles from Kandahar in east-central Pakistan — told a reporter they had "prayed together" with bin Laden on Friday, shortly after returning from fighting anti-Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan.

But in general, they added, he and his foreign disciples rarely mingle with Afghans in Kandahar. Bin Laden spent time in Afghanistan in the 1980s, helping train and organize Arabs who had volunteered to fight alongside the Afghan Islamic guerrillas against Soviet invaders. Later, he developed close ties with the Taliban; now he is once again headquartered in Afghanistan, this time as the Taliban's honored guest.

Last week, as rumors swept Pakistan and Afghanistan that an American military assault against bin Laden was imminent, Taliban officials were quoted in the Pakistani press as saying bin Laden had tripled the security forces around his compound and was sleeping in a different location every two nights.

"He has his own people," said a Taliban militiaman in Quetta. "He has 1,000 to 1,500 personal guards; they are Arabs too." The militiaman, who gave his name as Abdulquibir, wore a long black beard and flowing green robes, and a healing bullet wound was visible on one of his legs. Asked his opinion of bin Laden, Abdulquibir grinned and said only, "He is our guest so we must protect him. But he has come as a refugee this time. What can he do for us?"

Bin Laden, whom U.S. officials implicated in the embassy bombings earlier this month in Kenya and Tanzania that killed nearly 250 people, including 12 Americans, has long been considered a leading sponsor of terrorism directed against U.S. interests. Dedicated to a purist vision of Islam and a campaign to rid Islam's holy sites of Israeli, U.S. and other western influences, bin Laden is believed to have at least 3,000 followers throughout the Arab world, many of whom he met and trained during his time in Afghanistan a decade ago.

He inherited a fortune estimated at up to $300 million from his late father, a Saudi construction magnate. While relatives say he no longer has anything to do with the family firm, he is known to control businesses of his own.

Bin Laden was stripped of his Saudi citizenship in 1994, after criticizing the regime there, and moved to Sudan — the other target of the U.S. raids. Following the triumph of the Taliban, whose leaders had been comrades from the years of struggle against the Soviets, he shifted to Afghanistan.

"I never met him, but I know he helped the mujaheddin a lot during the war. And he was not the only one. There were many others from Arab countries who supplied us with financial and military aid," said Abdul Manan, 28, a former resistance fighter and devout Muslim who now cooks in an Afghan restaurant in Quetta. "They came to help us liberate our country, and many gave their lives for the glory of Islam."

At first, bin Laden settled near the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, where he was described in some press reports as operating out of a remote mountaintop cave filled with high-tech communications equipment. There, it was said, he lived a Spartan life and slept with a Kalashnikov rifle next to his bed. But in April 1997 his operations were moved to the Kandahar region.

Since then, while the secretive Saudi millionaire has rarely been seen in the city, he has made his presence felt. Visitors from Kandahar interviewed in Quetta said bin Laden had commissioned a new mosque to be built on the site of a defunct cinema — now banned by the Taliban. They also said he and Saudi associates had invested in some new apartments and commercial projects.

Among Afghans in this region, where cross-border trade and travel is common despite the rugged mountain road that divides Kandahar and Quetta, opinions of bin Laden gathered were largely negative. One former resistance fighter called him "an enemy of humanity."

But while expressing outrage at the idea that bin Laden might be fomenting terrorist attacks from the region, many Afghans also said they blamed Pakistan and the United States for helping radical Islamic groups to flourish during the resistance to Soviet rule, and then washing their hands of the consequences.

"If radical terrorism has found a breeding ground in Afghanistan, it is because of outside forces," said Hamid Karzai, a former Afghan diplomat who lives in Quetta. He said he had repeatedly warned American officials that there was "tremendous outside support for the Taliban, but no one listened to us."

Bin Laden . . . directs his operations from a heavily guarded hilltop compound outside the Afghan city of Kandahar

Exercising The Right to Self-Defence

EDITORIAL

THE United States was correct to send its military forces into action against terrorist bases in Afghanistan and Sudan last week. The bombing two weeks ago of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed more than 250 people and injured thousands more was an act of war. It is not the kind of war many Americans grew up with, in which one country invades another, but it is war nonetheless. The United States has not only a right but, as Defense Secretary William Cohen said, an obligation to fight back.

In fashioning a response to terrorism, which by definition is conducted from the shadows, the United States always will face the question of what threshold of evidence must be crossed to justify a counterattack. Americans above all must take care not to lash out without cause. Yet it will not always be possible to build a foolproof and public case. When the evidence is compelling and the imminent threat to Americans real, as Cohen said it was in this case, terrorists must know they have no sanctuary. Congress will have a role to play in checking and weighing the administration's case, in secret if necessary. But already Speaker Newt Gingrich has said that, having been well briefed during the past two weeks, he believes the attack was "the right thing to do at the right time."

Certainly, Osama bin Laden has made no secret of his goals and methods. He has openly declared war on Americans and on Jews. "We do not distinguish between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians."

A few Republicans questioned whether President Clinton had ordered the attack to distract from his personal and legal troubles. But there is no possibility that Cohen or Gen. Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would order U.S. forces into action if they were not convinced of the necessity. As Sen. Jesse Helms, Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "Sooner or later, terrorists will realize that America's differences end at the water's edge, and that the United States' political leadership always has, and always will, stand united in the face of international terrorism."

So Clinton has taken the right step. Experience has shown that the risks of such retaliation are more bearable than the risks involved in doing nothing to defend America's interests. But the risks are real, and they mean that the United States can't expect one battle to end this war. "This is an organization dedicated to killing Americans," Gingrich said. "We have an obligation to hit them, and if necessary to keep hitting them, until they lose all of their ability to hurt Americans."

Clinton Still Riding High in Polls

David S. Broder and Richard Morin

AMERICANS continue to see President Clinton as a strong leader in touch with their problems even as a growing majority express doubts about his honesty, integrity and moral character, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News survey.

The poll describes a public that sees two very different Bill Clintons: The president whose stewardship of the nation's economy and decisiveness in foreign affairs they continue to applaud, and the man whose scandal-plagued personal life is viewed with increased disgust, embarrassment and even sadness.

At the end of last week, Clinton's job-approval rating stood at 66 percent, barely below its all-time high. Three in four approved of the way he is handling the economy, his best performance on this key measure of his presidency. Seven in 10 Americans surveyed think he is doing a good job directing the nation's foreign policy, also a record high.

At the same time, 28 percent say he is honest and trustworthy, while 19 percent say he has high moral and ethical standards — both new lows in Post-ABC surveys. Four in 10 said he probably did something illegal in connection with his affair with former White House intern Monica S. Lewinsky. And half said he was not completely truthful about their relationship when he testified to a grand jury last week.

These sentiments were reflected in interviews with voters in an Illinois congressional district southwest of Chicago, which supported Clinton in 1996 but also elected a Republican House member.

"I voted for him," said Robert Hutchason, 45, a salesman for a soft-drink company, "but I probably should have gone the other way. He's done a good job as president, but he's been a liar from the start. He's let the country down. I don't think it will help to impeach him. It would just be a waste of money."

The Post-ABC poll found that 62 percent say the president should not resign or be forced from office for lying about his relationship with Lewinsky. Just over half — 54 percent — say he should not be impeached even if he encouraged her to lie about it under oath.

However, if independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr turns over evidence to Congress of a pattern of instances in which the president has attempted to cover up wrongdoing, more than half — 52 percent — of Americans say he should be impeached.

A separate survey of 416 adults was conducted after the United States bombed suspected terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan.

By 3 to 1, Americans approved of Clinton's decision. More than six in 10 of those surveyed believed Clinton ordered the attacks to punish terrorists and disrupt their plans. Only one in four, or 27 percent, said the president launched the raids mainly to divert attention away from the Lewinsky investigation.

Many Americans also questioned whether Clinton can devote sufficient attention to the country's problems while dealing with his own. More than six in 10 believed the scandal is interfering with his "ability to deal effectively with international terrorism and other problems around the world."

Court Sets Rules for Quebec Secession

Steven Pearlstein in Toronto

WEIGHING in on the country's longest-running political feud, Canada's Supreme Court declared unanimously last week that the French-speaking province of Quebec does not have the right to unilaterally declare its independence from the rest of Canada.

At the same time, the nine justices said that if Quebec voters embrace secession, the Canadian constitution and international law would both require the federal government and the other provinces to negotiate in good faith to bring about the country's breakup.

"The continued existence and operation of the Canadian constitutional order cannot remain unaffected by the unambiguous expression of a clear majority of Quebecers that they no longer wish to remain in Canada," said the court.

The long-awaited decision was a legal victory for the government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien, which requested the advisory opinion in an effort to cool secessionist sentiment in a province that is home to one in four Canadians, including the prime minister himself. Quebec voters narrowly defeated a secession referendum in 1995, and the ruling Parti Quebecois has vowed to hold another referendum if it holds onto its majority in the provincial assembly in the next election.

Even if Quebec voters opt clearly for secession, however, the Supreme Court said, that would only begin a long and difficult process of amending the country's basic governing charter.

"Democracy means more than simple majority rule," said the court, noting that the demands of democracy must be balanced with the requirements of a federal system and the interests of various minority groups. "Secession of a province under the Constitution could not be achieved . . . without principled negotiation with other participants" in the Canadian confederation.

At a minimum, the court said that Quebec's secession would require the acquiescence not only of the federal Parliament but also of seven of the country's 10 provinces — the normal requirements for amending the Canadian constitution. Several previous attempts to amend the Canadian constitution to accommodate Quebec's urges for greater independence have foundered.

Both separatists and federalists quickly found reason to declare victory, reflecting the careful political balancing act on the part of the nine-member court. Chretien said that the court had "well served all Canadians by bringing clarity to certain fundamental rules" and rejecting the hard-line secessionist arguments of Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard. Chretien said he hoped the court's opinion would now be an occasion for Quebecers to "put aside" the secession question.

And in Quebec City, Jacques Brassard, the province's combative minister of intergovernmental affairs, hailed the opinion for its "uncompromising reaffirmation" of the right of Quebecers to self-determination. Quebec declined to participate in the case, arguing it did not recognize the authority of the federal court.

The tension between Canada's French and English communities is as old as the country itself. Ever since British Redcoats defeated French troops on the Plains of Abraham outside Montreal in 1759, French Canadians have complained of a second-class status in Canada. Ironically, the independence movement has gained momentum only in recent years, just as Quebec gained a greater measure of social, economic and political power.



Winning smile . . . Federalist lawyer Guy Bertrand outside the Supreme Court in Ottowa after the historic decision PHOTO: TOM HANSON

Last week's decision had been heralded as the most important ever to be made by the high court, which maintains a much lower profile here than the U.S. Supreme Court. Its 50-page opinion amounted to an essay on democracy, federalism, human rights and the rule of law. And its importance was underscored not only by the fact that the opinion was issued in the name of the entire court, but also by the fact that it was issued during the normally sacrosanct political summer holiday here.

"What the court said today is that secession is possible, but it will have to be accomplished through a long and difficult negotiation process," said Christopher Manfredi, a constitutional scholar at McGill University in Montreal. "It is not going to be as simple as holding a referendum."

"As we say in French, this decision cuts the pear in half," said Jacques Yvan Morin, a professor of public law at the University of Montreal. "It's a very subtle, very intelligent decision."

New Tobacco Hazard For Babies

John Schwartz

WOMEN who smoke while pregnant appear to pass a potent carcinogen to the babies developing in their wombs, researchers reported last Sunday.

"These results demonstrate a significant potential risk to the unborn child of a woman who smokes," said Stephen S. Hecht of the University of Minnesota Cancer Center, who led the research.

Hecht analyzed the first urine samples collected from 48 babies of smokers and nonsmokers in Germany. He looked for NNK, a carcinogen found only in tobacco products, and for byproducts of NNK after it had been processed by the body — NNAL and NNAL-Gluc.

"We found that the positive samples were only from the newborns of mothers who smoked," Hecht said. Of the 31 samples from mothers who smoked during pregnancy, 22 contained NNK, NNAL or NNAL-Gluc. Babies of nonsmokers had none of those substances in their urine, Hecht said.

NNK, which is from the family of cancer-causing substances known as nitrosamines, is not the only carcinogen in tobacco smoke but it is especially powerful. It can cause adenocarcinoma, a kind of lung cancer found largely in smokers. Studies have also shown that the toxin can be passed from mother to offspring in animals.

The new findings provide yet another reason why pregnant women should not smoke, Hecht said. Only 39 percent of smokers quit when they become pregnant, according to a 1990 study in the American Journal of Public Health.

Previous studies have shown increases in respiratory ailments among the children of smokers, as well as other health problems. Smoking during pregnancy also has been linked to low birth weight and other conditions. And smoking itself has long been known to cause health problems.

The levels of NNK and the related chemicals found in babies in the new study was about 10 percent of the amount of those substances found in smokers.

It remains unknown, however, whether babies born to smoking mothers have an increased risk of developing cancer. Part of the reason it has been difficult to study this question is that parents tend to continue to smoke throughout their child's lives, and many of the children exposed in the womb may grow up to be smokers themselves.

"The epidemiology does not show a clear relationship between exposure in utero and cancer later on in life," Hecht said. "This is still an exposure that cannot be good. It can only be bad."

Hecht reported the findings at the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society in Boston. The research has not been subjected to peer review, the usual vetting process for published studies but rarely a part of presentations at scientific meetings.

A representative of the Tobacco Institute, the industry's lobbying and policy arm, said that none of the spokespersons for the organization had seen the Hecht research and could not comment on it specifically.

Unabomber's Brother Gets $1m Reward

William Claiborne

THE FBI, which for nearly two decades mounted the most intensive manhunt in bureau history but still failed to catch the serial terrorist known as the Unabomber, gave a $1 million reward to David Kaczynski last week for turning in his brother Theodore.

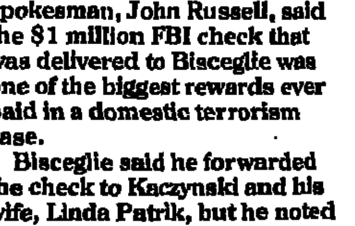
David Kaczynski, a 47-year-old Schenectady, New York, youth shelter social worker, publicly anguished over tipping federal authorities to his older brother's presence in a remote, hermit's shack in Montana in April 1995. He has said repeatedly that, rather than keep it himself, he will use most of the reward to ease the grief of families victimized by his brother's bombs.

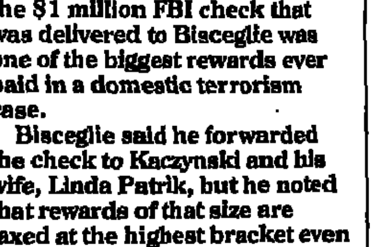
The Kaczynski family feels giving most of the money to the victims "might help us resolve our grief over what happened," he said.

"That certainly still is his intent," said the Kaczynski family attorney, Anthony Bisceglie.

Kaczynski also said he needs to use some of the reward money to pay off the family's legal bills resulting from the Unabomber case.

A Justice Department spokesman, John Russell, said the $1 million FBI check that was delivered to Bisceglie was one of the biggest rewards ever paid in a domestic terrorism case.

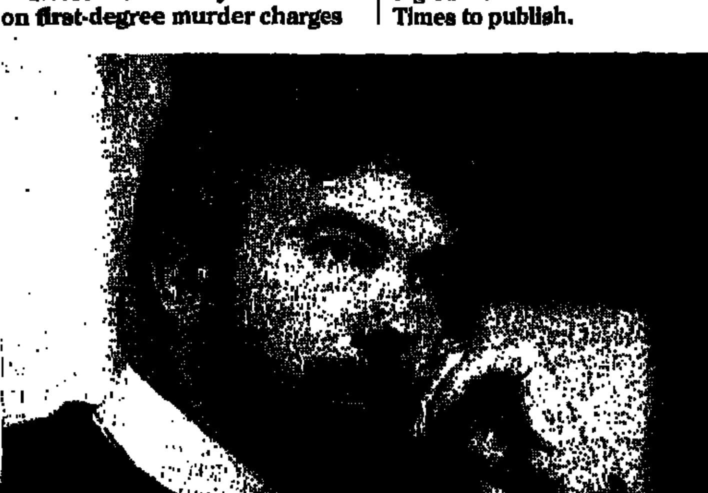




Bisceglie said he forwarded the check to Kaczynski and his wife, Linda Patrik, but he noted that rewards of that size are taxed at the highest bracket even if the money is given to victims' families. Placing the money in trust could lessen the federal and state levies, he said.

Theodore J. Kaczynski's trial on first-degree murder charges ended last January in a plea agreement in which the government, citing his mental illness, agreed not to seek the death penalty.

Although the FBI amassed thousands of leads over 18 years while futilely tracking the Unabomber, agents did not have a clue to Theodore Kaczynski's identity until his younger brother, at his wife's urging, read a 35,000-word anti-technology manifesto that the serial bomber had prevailed upon The Washington Post and The New York Times to publish.



David Kaczynski: Recognized brother's themes PHOTO: RICH PEDRONCELLI

Unabom Task Force agents involved in the manhunt said they may never have found the reclusive, 55-year-old former mathematics professor without the help provided by his brother.

Recognizing in the rambling document delusional themes he had heard or read in letters over a lifetime, particularly after his brother quit his tenured professorship at the University of California-Berkeley, David Kaczynski approached FBI agents through an intermediary and told them about his fears. Even then, David said in an interview after his brother had pleaded guilty, he was not convinced Theodore was the Unabomber.

"I had never seen him violent, not toward me, not toward anyone. I tended to see his anger turned inward," he said.

Even though lead Unabom prosecutor Robert J. Cleary called him a "true American hero," David Kaczynski said he did not consider himself a hero for ending the bombings that killed three people and injured 29 others between 1978 and 1995.

But he said he did believe that something good had resulted from his act: the public was safe from more bombings and his brother was safe in prison — from others and from himself.

Russia lacks money to clear dumps of rotting chemical weapons. **David Hoffman** reports from Leonidovka

A Cold War Curse

IN A verdant pine forest here, sprinkled with birch trees, the lush growth suddenly disappears. Underbrush gives way to a black ulcer on the earth. In the clearing nothing grows, not even grass.

Vladimir Pankratov, a gray-haired former Soviet military man who is now an environmentalist, kicked at the ground on the edge of the dark clearing in the woods. He kicked again and again. He poked a stick into the soil — and pried up the nose cone of an aerial bomb.

This hole in the middle of a Russian forest is an uncharted chemical weapons graveyard. Buried here are vintage World War II aerial bombs, filled with a mixture of deadly lewisite, a blistering poison gas, and yperite, a sulfur mustard gas.

These abandoned bombs are a visible symbol of Russia's chemical weapons nightmare: It has more chemical bombs than any country, and it cannot get rid of them, or even find them all. Forty thousand tons of chemical weapons are stored in officially declared military depots. But thousands of other bombs lie in abandoned and uncharted weapons dumps, like this one. The Russian military, which created these undeclared dumps decades ago, still denies they exist.

Entombed in the forest here by Soviet soldiers in the early 1960s and then forgotten, the bombs are coming back to haunt the environment of today's Russia. Preliminary tests by a team of experts working with Pankratov have found heavy concentrations of arsenic in the soil. Lewisite is 36 percent arsenic. The black, sandy scars on the forest floor give off a powerful metallic odor.

Moreover, the poison is spreading in an area where hundreds of thousands of people live. Water and soil tests by Pankratov's team show that arsenic is turning up in higher concentrations than normal 2½ miles away in bottom sediments of tributaries to the Sursk Reservoir. The reservoir provides drinking water to Penza, the nearby provincial capital, with a population of 530,000.

Penza, 350 miles southeast of Moscow, is located in the rich black-earth farming belt of southern Russia, part of the Volga River basin, which itself was home to much of the Soviet chemical warfare industry.

Arsenic is extremely toxic. In acute poisoning, violent stomach and intestinal inflammation and bleeding lead to massive losses of fluid and bodily salts, causing collapse, shock and death. Long-term low-level exposure can lead to other ailments, including cancer.

Not on any map, protected only by one distant sign warning people to keep out, the chemical weapons graveyard is a small glimpse of what is becoming a painful torment for Russia — the legacy of chemical and nuclear weapons production during the Cold War.

Across Russia's vast steppes and Siberian taiga, and into the seas from the Baltic to the Pacific, the Soviet Union and later Russia have dumped, buried, spilled and exploded chemical and nuclear substances that had only one purpose — to kill people. They were the ingredients or byproducts of weapons of mass destruction. They were the wastes of the Cold War. Now, they continue to damage the land and people.

Although the Soviet Union has collapsed, a full accounting of the contamination it loosed on the environment has never been made. For most of the Cold War, the Soviet Union kept the sources of this pollution — the arsenals and bomb factories — shielded by the strictest secrecy. Little is known even now about the clandestine dumping and destruction of chemical weapons and radioactive materials. Moreover, little is being done about it, despite the health risks. In some cases, Russian authorities simply deny a threat exists and continue to stamp the files "top secret."

"This place has been abandoned," said Pankratov, surveying the chemical weapons graveyard, which lies less than a mile from one of the declared depots where nerve gas is stored. "No one is responsible for it. This information about old destruction sites hasn't been opened, it's still classified, and we are talking about it now because we have to face the obvious — we are talking about a dangerous contamination of the soil."

The contamination may become an enormous economic burden to a country already flat on its back. Russia simply cannot afford to clean up the poisons left behind by 50 years of dumping and discharge by the military and its bombmaking industry. The pollution is a potential health time bomb, causing an increased incidence of cancer and disease for which no one wants to take responsibility, especially the beleaguered Russian military.



Vladimir Pankratov, a Russian environmentalist, pokes part of a chemicals-weapons bomb buried near Leonidovka PHOTO: DAVID HOFFMAN

After an initial surge of citizen activism at the end of the Soviet period, Russians today are more focused on economic survival, sometimes desperately.

"People are indifferent," said Vladimir Verzhbovsky, a journalist in Penza. "Those who try and arouse public opinion are treated as clowns and not taken seriously. Life is so hard. Salaries haven't been paid, in some cases for years. And people think, how are they going to feed the children? People are aware they are living on a powder keg. But their current interests are different."

The small rural village of Leonidovka sits at a crossroads of two huge problems, both inherited from the Soviet era.

One is that Russia has the world's largest supply of chemical weapons, which it promised by treaty to liquidate but now cannot afford to destroy. The other is that, before the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, tons of chemical weapons were discarded by the military and forgotten, and they are now an ecological threat. No one knows where they are, or how much of the deadly poisons are leaching into the air, water and soil.

Leonidovka is near one of the uncharted chemical weapons dumps, hidden in the nearby forest. The village also sits next to a walled military base that is an official depot for thousands of tons of the still-active chemical bombs.

Russia has formally declared it holds about 40,000 tons of chemical weapons. The stockpile consists of 32,200 tons of nerve gases — sarin, soman and VX — and 7,700 tons of lewisite, mustard gas and their mixtures. They are stored in seven depots, including Leonidovka.

Behind the arsenal's high walls here are 15 million pounds of VX, sarin and soman gases packed into aviation bombs.

These are known as nerve agents because they attack the nervous system after inhalation or contact with the skin. They can kill within minutes at very low doses. The agent sarin was used in the Aum Supreme Truth cult's 1995 terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway system, which killed 12 people and injured 5,500.

At Leonidovka alone, there is more than enough nerve gas, if distributed by individual doses, to wipe out every human on Earth.

Residents are uneasy. "People feel concerned, there is no denying it," said Irina Molchanova, 33, a deputy school principal. She asked a visitor, "Do you think we are living on a powder keg?"

Russia has promised to liquidate the declared arsenal of 40,000 tons of chemical weapons. It signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993 and ratified it in 1996. The treaty, which took effect last year, calls for abolishing the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons and outlaws their use. Most experts agree that Russia's aging stocks have outlived any military utility. Under the treaty, Russia and other nations agreed to destroy the weapons over 10 to 15 years. The United States already has begun destroying its stockpile of 32,000 tons of chemical weapons at two sites and is expected to finish by 2004 at a cost of about $13 billion.

BUT Russia's government is chronically short of cash, and the military establishment is collapsing for lack of money. Gen. Stanislav Petrov, commander of Russia's radiation, chemical and biological defense troops, said in an interview that Russia needs $5.5 billion to liquidate the chemical weapons. But in the last two years, he said, the government delivered only 2 or 3 percent of what was budgeted for the program, which is falling behind schedule.

While publicly declaring the size of the stockpile, Russia and the Soviet Union have never accounted for bombs that were secretly dumped and destroyed in earlier years, many of which are decaying in unmarked graveyards like the one in the woods outside Leonidovka.

Lev Fedorov, an activist who is president of the Union of Chemical Safety, a citizens' network, has estimated that the Soviet authorities dumped half a million tons of chemical weapons in three periods between the end of World War II and the late 1980s.

Many were sunk at sea in 12 locations in the Baltic Sea, the Kara Sea and the Sea of Japan. Tens of thousands of tons also were buried in unmarked and still undisclosed graveyards around the Soviet Union, according to Fedorov.

Colombia's President Shakes Up Army

Serge F. Kovaleski in Barrancabermeja

IN LATE April and early May, a Colombian army battalion stationed in this oil-refining town received two urgent communiques from the country's leading intelligence agency warning that right-wing paramilitary death squads might be preparing to launch a massacre.

The dispatches stated that the attack might take place in a neighborhood called the Twentieth of August, a community in northeast Barrancabermeja that has been a stronghold of support for leftist rebels.

But despite the alerts, dozens of heavily armed paramilitary troops rolled into town on the night of May 16 and unleashed a campaign of terror for several hours without encountering resistance from a single soldier or police officer. The masked gunmen killed seven people and kidnapped 25 others. In June, the assailants declared that they had killed all the hostages and burned the bodies after determining that the captives had links to the guerrillas.

Government investigators said nine soldiers from the New Granada Battalion waved four vehicles carrying the paramilitary troops through an army checkpoint before and after the attack and at least one soldier participated in the killings.

The attack and subsequent atrocities highlight the reason the United States is conditioning its support for the Colombian military on its willingness to break its ties with the paramilitary forces, which have been operating here for more than 30 years.

At a time when Colombia's two main guerrilla groups have dealt the armed forces devastating defeats, the military — which receives U.S. training and aid ostensibly to fight drug trafficking — has strengthened its ties to paramilitary fronts to bolster its battle against the estimated 20,000 Marxist insurgents.

U.S. and Colombian military sources said this month's decision of the new president, Andres Pastrana, to abruptly dismiss the entire high command and retire other senior officers was an important step in weakening the ties between the armed forces and paramilitary groups.

The new president took the unusual step of reaching beyond higher ranking generals to name the new commanders of the army, navy and air force, passing over senior officers and forcing several generals with known ties to paramilitary organizations to retire. The records of those promoted were reviewed by both Colombian and U.S. intelligence to make sure they were not tied to drug trafficking or human rights abuses, the officials said.

"This crop of recently harvested generals and admirals breaks a long-standing tradition of 'seniority first' in selecting service chiefs in the military," said F. Andy Messing Jr., a military analyst at the conservative National Defense Council Foundation.

Several high-profile cases involving abuses by government security forces, most of them in conjunction with paramilitary groups, have surfaced recently.

Last month, the prosecutor general's office said two sergeants from the 4th Army Division had been linked to a massacre a year ago by paramilitary forces in the eastern province of Meta in which about 30 people were killed.

Late last month, then president Ernesto Samper apologized for five massacres that were committed by state security forces between 1991 and 1993 in which 49 people died. And four months ago, the military dismantled the 20th Intelligence Brigade, which prosecutors had implicated in several killings of civilians.

Hellbound Safari

Louis Bayard

THE LOST TRIBE
By Mark Lee
St. Martin's. 278 pp. $22

MARK LEE'S taut adventure, The Lost Tribe, has one of the year's peachier opening lines: "On the morning of my execution, I woke up late and found a marabou stork tapping on the window of my hotel room." All right, One Hundred Years Of Solitude started with an execution, too, but give Lee credit: One sentence, and he's located us in existential space. That ol' marabou stork is not toting welcome trinkets, and the narrator, a burned-out American journalist named Benjamin Chase, has a shadow of death trailing him like a hangover.

Stranded in war-ravaged central Africa, Ben spends his days drinking and listening to gunfire from the bed of his blacked-out hotel room. "Like many expatriates in Africa," he says, "I had lost faith in everything but the hope that something would happen if I remained."

Enter David Mather, a former missionary who has gulled a relief organization into sponsoring a water-drilling expedition into the remote Northern District. Mather has one overriding mission: to make contact with the Maji, mysterious nomadic people who just might be the only living remnants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.

Never mind that the Lost Tribes were last seen being hauled away by Assyrians in the Book of Kings. In Mather's eyes, they "come from an age when God walked on the earth and spoke to mankind. Worshiping with them and studying their scripture, we would share their vision. Like new apostles, we would return to the world to teach and write and speak of what we have seen."

Ben is sold. So is the rest of the biblically named crew, including Thomas, a doubting anthropologist, and his wife, Rachel, and pretty soon it's all aboard for the heart of darkness. Convoying in two trucks and a Land Rover, the pilgrims encounter starving guerrillas, rebellious government soldiers, and half-crazed French colonials. And the farther they go, the more they hear of Maji atrocities, which reportedly extend to separating men from their tongues. Our pilgrims, though, stay the course. "If I quit at this point and walked away," Ben explains, "I would be accepting a lifetime of hesitation."

Or you'd just be a sensible fella. But as anyone steeped in Conrad and Graham Greene knows, narrators can't, mustn't turn back. Indeed, one sometimes wonders if Africa has any value to Anglo writers except as a forced metaphorical march — a way of stripping away the accretions of Western civilization. It's fortunate, then, that Lee, a former journalist who covered Uganda's civil war, is able to ground his Africa in vivid, economically wrought pictures.

"We passed a village that was overgrown with sunflowers, and another village that was the home of an enormous flock of green parrots that screeched and swirled through the air. One of the larger towns had been conquered by a troop of baboons. They stared at the trucks for a few seconds with their sad, doglike faces, then an old male barked a command and the troop scrambled through the broken walls of the huts."

ILLUSTRATION: JILL KARLA SCHWARZ

Without overwriting, Lee can convey the sprinting pace of a brush fire, the horror of an elephant slaughter, the hair-trigger tenseness of a military checkpoint. It's not surprising, really, that his book has been optioned for the movies. He has already done much of the screenwriter's work, right down to the action sequences.

And maybe some compelling lead actor can make up for the book's major deficiency, which is its dismayingly bland Ahab figure. Messianic charisma is a difficult quality to convey in print (right up there with charm), but David Mather just doesn't have the visionary gleam it would take to lead people into hell.

Forget the Lost Tribes, then. What impresses in Lee's book is the found Africa — the puffy white color of burning cattle dung; a drooping sign on an abandoned hotel; flocks of birds hovering over a fire, feeding on the insects that get flushed out. These are the moments when you can almost believe Ben's mantra: "You have to take the journey. Take the journey and you might understand."

Serving Up Kosher Food for Thought

Sanford Pinsker

KAATERSKILL FALLS
By Allegra Goodman
Dial. 324 pp. $23.95

RELIGIOUSLY observant Jews played a role (of sorts) in Jewish-American fiction long before a precocious 21-year-old writer named Allegra Goodman made her literary debut with an astonishing collection of stories entitled Sudden Immersion (1989). Her next book, The Family Markowitz (1993), not only cobbled earlier stories about the eccentric, vividly etched Markowitzes with newer ones, but, more important, it gave their saga the look and feel of a novel. Critics soon ran out of superlatives when it came to describing Goodman's crafted paragraphs, keen sense of observation, and gently satiric humor. For her, observant Jews were not automatically relegated to the sidelines or turned into condescending jokes as in the bulk of Jewish-American fiction from Abraham Cahan's The Rise Of David Levinsky (1918) onward; rather, she brought to Orthodox Jewish life both an insider's sensibility and a writerly understanding of how to construct literary characters.

Kaaterskill Falls not only continues this beat but also expands it by re-creating the world of upstate New York bungalow colonies during the mid-1970s. For those who associate the Catskills with Borscht Belt cut-ups and secular, increasingly assimilated Jews, Goodman's tale of the clash between Yankee year-rounders and ultra-Orthodox summer people (most of them disciples of Rav Elijah Kirshner) plunges readers into a world where flesh-and-blood Jewish characters can have deeply held religious convictions as well as vulnerable human dimensions.

The result is a novel that, however quiet, however subtly understated, is filled with ambition. Not only does Goodman include a wide array of characters (Jewish and non-Jewish) and their respective motivations; but, equally impressive, she creates a world that gives the natural wonder of Kaaterskill Falls its full due. Occasions to admire the shape and ring of her sentences abound.

But what will strike most readers is the way Goodman's novel makes the ultra-Orthodox look simultaneously exotic and familiar. With the possible exceptions of Chaim Potok and Nessa Rapoport, I cannot think of a single Jewish-American novelist who sets scene after scene in a synagogue or who can describe the religious sensibilities of the ultra-Orthodox in such concrete, nontreacly detail. Here, for example, is Goodman's initial description of Elizabeth Schulman, a character who will ultimately loom very large in daily life as Kirshner Hasidim live it: "For her religion is a habit, ritual so commonplace, that she takes it for granted. She worships God three times a day in her room, and while she would never say she felt a familiarity with her Creator, the prayers are familiar, and she's used to approaching him. The sacred isn't mysterious to her, and so she romanticizes the secular."

Goodman makes the ultra-Orthodox look simultaneously exotic and familiar

It is hardly surprising that Elizabeth later fixes on a project to open a small general store that will provide kosher food for summer residents, for she is a restless spirit. However, where Goodman's account differs from previous fiction is that Elizabeth remains part of the Kirshner community even after the old rebbe dies and his stickler son yanks her license. For Goodman, a character living within limitations — and disappointment — is at least as interesting a fictional possibility as a protagonist who leaves a strict religious tradition for the secular attractions of a wider world.

Potok has made the latter plot his stock in trade, offering up a world of study, commandment and observance that his more sensitive characters melodramatically reject. Here Goodman strikes me as both wiser and more truthful. When the old Kirshner rebbe feels his life slipping away, he must choose which of his two sons will replace him: One is uncompromisingly pious, the other more brilliant but also more worldly. At first glance, the scenario sounds for all the world like a recycling of Potok's The Chosen, but in the final analysis it is not. For what Goodman means to explore is the emotions that churn beneath the surface and that give her characters fully rounded dimensions. Rav Kirshner, for example, is "no mystic. He is a rationalist, interested in law, not myth," and his leadership consists in a deep-seated belief that his disciples' way is already "laid out for them; they must seek guidance by learning *halachah* [Jewish law]." Still, he agonizes, as does Elizabeth and, indeed, most of the other families Goodman assembles each summer at Kaaterskill Falls. What is not in doubt, however, is the ultra-Orthodoxy that defines them simultaneously as a community and as individual selves.

Sometimes, Goodman's descriptions are packed with gentle ironies, as when one character's parents are described this way: "Andras's parents taught him that if you are going to be religious, you have to do it all, observing every holiday and law. They believed that when it comes to God, you can't do things by halves — which was why they did nothing."

A final point: Jewish-American literature is filled with scenes, usually comic, that take place around the family dinner table or at a local delicatessen; but none can match what Goodman gives us in the texture and smell of kosher cooking. Few putatively "Jewish novels" manage the tricky business of giving equal weight to substance and style. Kaaterskill Falls does — and does so brilliantly.

Young and Restless

Jonathan Yardley

BADGE OF COURAGE
The Life of Stephen Crane
By Linda H. Davis
Houghton Mifflin. 414 pp. $35

STEPHEN CRANE died on June 5, 1900, at the age of 28, his career as a published writer having lasted only four years. Yet in that brief time he produced, according to his most recent — and best — biographer, "five novels, two volumes of poetry, three big story collections, two books of war stories, and countless works of short fiction and reporting." He also produced one of the enduring legends of American literature, "long . . . shrouded in myth and rumor, in the fantastic tales that began to form around him when he became world-famous at the age of 25."

The Crane legend has been fed over the years by his biographers, the first and most influential of whom, the gifted journalist Thomas Beer, wrote almost as much fiction about Crane as Crane had written about his own invented characters. As Linda Davis notes, Beer "apparently fabricated letters of Crane's and even invented stories and romances — including one with a woman named Helen Trent — which were for years picked up as fact by subsequent scholars, writers and biographers." The result has been a life's story so lost in fantasy as to bear no real relationship — except, perhaps, metaphoric — to the actual Stephen Crane.

Not merely did he write what remains, a century after its publication, the greatest of American war novels, The Red Badge Of Courage, but he was our first great war correspondent. Utterly untrained in military skills or discipline, slight of build and unprepossessing of manner, he nonetheless took his notebooks into battle with a disregard for his own safety that made him, "depending upon the observer . . . either the bravest man one had ever seen under fire or the most reckless."

Not merely that, but Crane conducted an amatory life that aroused intense scrutiny in his own time and continues to invite it in ours. Intensely, incurably romantic, he formed numerous romantic attachments, the most celebrated, or notorious, of which was with Cora Taylor, a prostitute who became his common-law wife and accompanied him to England; there, in the last years of his life, he and she participated in literary and social affairs with the likes of Joseph Conrad and Henry James, relationships that added still further to the glow of legend and romance with which, it seems, Crane will forever be surrounded.

Linda Davis cuts through the legend and romance with what appears to be a sharp, clean scalpel. Without denying Crane any of his glamour or drama, she gives a convincing portrait of a man who, raised in a word-haunted, perfervidly religious household, made language and faith — or the absence of faith — the touchstones of his writing life. She describes with vivid detail the sordid city streets to which the youthful Crane was drawn and out of which emerged his first masterpiece, Maggie: A Girl Of The Streets. She gives as well a convincing account of how The Red Badge Of Courage came into being, born in the reading and imaginings of his boyhood, transformed into enduring fiction as its author was in the first breath of maturity.

His body of work is small but a significant and lasting one. Crane followed and expanded upon the example of his friends and mentors Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells, bringing American writing out of Victorian gentility and overripe prose, paring it down and making it far more "American" than it had been. In time his own example became far greater than his mentors' had been, and he had proteges too numerous to count; but it is his work, not his influence, that still commands our attention. Linda Davis has done it, and him, what looks to be full justice.

Congo rebels 'plan to restore democracy'

Rémy Ourdan in Goma

ALL was quiet last week in Goma, the headquarters of the rebel forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The region is controlled by Rwanda-supported Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi) forces, who have been joined by some members of the Congolese regular army. Since the beginning of the uprising on August 2, they have speedily seized three key cities in the two Kivu provinces — Goma, Bukavu and Uvira.

The rebels' military commander, Jean-Pierre Ondekane, directs operations from the headquarters of the former Congolese Armed Forces (FAC), airlifting men and weapons at night to the various fronts.

It is in Goma that the rebel forces, a heterogeneous bunch despite their strong Rwandan Tutsi element, have been striving to set up the political machinery that will enable them to take over from President Laurent-Désiré Kabila if he loses the war.

Politicians from various backgrounds have set up a Congolese Rally for Democracy (RDC) in Goma. They include long-standing opposition figures such as Arthur Z'Ahidi Ngoma, who was recently proclaimed "chief of the rebellion", and erstwhile comrades of Kabila, among them his former foreign minister, Bizima Karaha, as well as one or two former supporters of the ousted president, Mobutu Sese Seko.

The "presidential villa", a sumptuous residence on Lake Kivu that was built by Mobutu and subsequently used by Kabila, has been the scene of much debate between rebel leaders about the still uncertain future of their movement.

"We want to give our movement a meaning," Ngoma told Le Monde. "Otherwise it would be tantamount to a military coup. Our aim, apart from kicking Kabila out, is to restore democracy in Congo." Ngoma, who fled to Paris last May after spending six months in jail in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, arrived in Goma on August 1, the day before the first rebel attack.

Once a pacifist, he has come round to the idea of supporting the present military operation, which is also backed by Uganda and Rwanda, despite official denials from Kampala and Kigali.

"We sincerely want to build democracy in Congo," Ngoma says. "After Mobutu's 32-year dictatorship, the country was cheated of its 'liberation'. We want to show how different we are. We respect human rights. Our soldiers never loot. When we enter Kinshasa, no one will be excluded — we want to bring people together, rebuild Congolese national unity and democratise public life."

Ngoma says he has already been in contact with "all the democratic forces in the country, including those who have been stuck in Kinshasa or exiled abroad", with a view to preparing the period of transition that would follow the ousting of Kabila.

But the rebellion's political leadership remains unstable. When the RDC announced on August 16 that it had set up an executive committee, some were surprised that Ngoma had not been included in it. The movement is now led by a virtual unknown, Ernest Wamba dia Wamba. However, Ngoma still appears to be leading the political wing of the rebellion.

"We didn't want to use the Kabila method; we didn't want to rely on a warlord," Ngoma says. "The term 'chief of the rebellion' didn't suit me, as it has too many unpleasant overtones in this country.

"So we formed a provisional collegial leadership, rather than a governmental structure that would have excluded those Congolese democrats who have not yet been able to join us. Everyone is welcome here . . . We shall together draw up the rules for a transition from the Kabila dictatorship to democracy."

Despite its fragility, the rebellion seems increasingly less isolated. Ngoma says he feels "encouraged" by the fact that several African countries have sent envoys to meet him. "You have to be courageous to support a rebellion. Yet people are doing precisely that, both in Africa and in Europe."

Asked about reports in the French press that he may have been in contact with the French presidency when preparing the uprising, Ngoma smiles and says: "A politician needs contacts. France is a country that has understood the purpose of our action."

ON AUGUST 12 the political wing of the rebellion published a scathing indictment of Kabila's record after 15 months in power: "Corruption, nepotism, patronage, arbitrary rule, an economy in ruins, a steady impoverishment of the population, the plundering of public funds, an inability on the part of the government to restore peace, security and unity, a manifest desire to split the national army, a massive return to repressive measures, collective massacres, murders and political imprisonment, incitement to violence, hatred and manipulation of ethnic feelings."

It is still too soon to tell whether the men of Goma will end up on the top of the heap if Kinshasa falls. Analysts point to the very close links between Karaha and the Kigali regime, while others are convinced that Ngoma has been nominated "chief of the rebellion" by President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.

It will be interesting to see how relations between Ngoma and Karaha develop. Karaha took part in Kabila's rebellion last year, and condoned the massacre of Hutu refugees that took place during the course of it, while Ngoma has always denounced crimes committed at that time by the rebels and their Rwandan allies.

Ngoma dismisses the possibility of Uganda and Rwanda taking control of Congo, and says that "the Congolese will be absolutely free to define how they move forward to democracy, and will not allow their victory to be turned into domination by any other country".

The key to the immediate future, however, lies not with politicians but with a handful of military officers who are increasing their influence throughout the country.

(August 19)

'A female intern?' 'No! Devaluation!'

Standing by your man in Russia again

EDITORIAL

THE Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, has made more than one U-turn in his political career. Ever since he came to power seven years ago, we have become accustomed to Yeltsin's habit of chopping and changing.

On August 14 he stated loud and clear that he would never devalue the rouble and that Russia would never suspend repayment of its foreign debt. Three days later, the same Yeltsin announced a devaluation of the currency and a 90-day moratorium on the repayment of foreign loans.

The possibility of a devaluation has to be denied right up to the last moment so as to prevent speculators from cashing in. But Yeltsin's latest change of course is more than a mere switch of tactics. Carried out under pressure from powerful financial and industrial lobbies — and also, to a lesser extent, nudged by the speculator George Soros — the devaluation of the rouble, accompanied by yet another cabinet reshuffle, also marks the devaluation of Boris Yeltsin.

It is a development that prompts questions about the future of the president himself. No one can deny that this former member of the Communist party is committed to reform. Inheriting a system that had been rocked to its foundations by the "Gorbachev revolution", he quickly liberalised the economy and democratised the country.

But he failed to establish the rule of law and to impose himself politically on a powerful parliament. He allowed organised crime to extend its hold over the country and allowed the salaries of too many civil servants to go unpaid.

The reason why aid is going to Russia — an umpteenth plan, to the tune of $22 billion, was cobbled together with the International Monetary Fund on July 20 — is not purely economic.

It is also seen as a way of propping up Yeltsin himself. President Clinton, who is due to meet his Russian counterpart in Moscow next month, and the German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, have always made a point of protecting Yeltsin. He is regarded as a guarantee of stability.

Washington has not forgotten, either, that Russia has nuclear weapons, as well as a seat on the United Nations Security Council. Bonn is perfectly aware that Russia's collapse would probably cost Europe more than all the aid that is now going to Yeltsin.

Usually a monetary crisis is merely the symptom of another kind of crisis — one of confidence. It can often be salutary in that it precipitates much-needed changes. This has been demonstrated more than once in Asia, where monetary devaluations have brought down outdated, corrupt and inefficient regimes.

Will Russia prove an exception to the rule? Will it be able to make do much longer with mere cabinet reshuffles while allowing the president to hang on? The patience of the Russian people may turn out not to be inexhaustible. That is something that Western governments should also keep in mind.

(August 19)

JAL in blooming scandal

Philippe Pons in Tokyo

MOST Japanese have been only a little surprised to learn that Japan Airlines, the country's leading carrier, has had links with organised crime. JAL's president, Isao Kaneko, admitted as much on August 17. The police have arrested three professional racketeers, and suspect that JAL made payments to them of 80 million yen ($550,000) between 1990 and 1998 in order to ensure that shareholders' meetings were not disrupted.

The scandal confirms that large Japanese companies have close ties with organised crime. In JAL's defence it could be argued that the amount of its payoffs to the racketeers — which were disguised as payment for the hire of potted plants — was modest compared with the billions of yen shelled out in the past by Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank and Japan's leading securities firm, Nomura.

However JAL's case has been aggravated by the fact that the racketeers the airline had dealings with have connections with Sumiyoshi-kai, one of the two main crime syndicates in the Tokyo region.

Sokaiya are a peculiarly Japanese unofficial management tool that have existed since shares were first listed on the stock exchange at the turn of the century. They are men who hold a small number of shares in many different companies. This entitles them to attend shareholders' meetings and, when necessary, protect board members from being put on the spot by awkward questions from the floor by monopolising the speaking time allotted to shareholders.

The Chiso company used the tactic in the 1970s to fend off shareholders' questions about the catastrophic pollution its factory had caused in Minamata Bay.

Another sokaiya, whose name features on JAL's list of VIP shareholders, managed to silence the parents of one of the victims of the 1985 air crash — which killed 520 people — at the shareholders' meeting in 1986.

In 1982 a change in commercial law made it illegal for companies to remunerate sokaiya. But the reform failed to eradicate them. Indeed, sokaiya activities became increasingly criminal.

The sokaiya began to play a double game. While ostensibly acting as guard dogs for directors, they also became blackmailers who threatened corporate reputations. In most cases firms preferred to pay up and keep the sokaiya quiet rather than denounce their blackmail to the police.

Racketeers thus became a mechanism that was part and parcel of corporate life. The finance and service sectors were the first to be affected; then it was the turn of industrial companies. The group of sokaiya involved with JAL also worked for Toyota and Nissan.

The speculative "bubble" of the late eighties not only generated a huge volume of bad debts; it also reinforced the collusion between organised crime and apparently respectable businessmen.

(August 19)



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
August 30 1998

Down Mexico way . . . Orson Welles and Marlene Dietrich in Touch Of Evil

Weaving his way through fact and fiction

Samuel Blumenfeld

Positif July/August 1998
Editions Jean-Michel Place,
162pp 60 francs

IN HIS introduction to André Bazin's book on Orson Welles, François Truffaut wrote that the director of Citizen Kane was someone whose personality appeared in a constantly shifting light as new biographies and studies of his work appeared. This is amply confirmed by the special dossier on Welles in the latest issue of the film magazine Positif.

It contains a long and enthralling interview Welles gave to Richard Marienstras in 1974 on the subject of Shakespeare. It was not the first interview that Welles had given on the subject — he already had under his belt such movies as Macbeth, Othello, Chimes At Midnight (centred on Falstaff) and The Merchant Of Venice (a film made for television that has vanished without trace).

But the interview is transformed into a veritable dialogue by Marienstras's knowledge of Elizabethan theatre, the highly intelligent way in which he applies it to Welles's films, including those not based on Shakespeare — as in the fascinating part of the interview devoted to Touch Of Evil, where the policeman played by Charlton Heston is referred to as a specimen of the "new man, a technocrat of the law and no rabble-rouser".

Other interesting ideas thrown up by the interview include the portrayal of Macbeth as a weak and stupid Christian with no battle skills, who is manipulated by his wife and the forces of evil, the depiction of Henry V as a great Machiavellian prince who plans from the very start to betray Falstaff, and the notion that Othello is quite simply Iago's murderous double.

It is often hard to separate fact from fiction in what Welles says. Marienstras strives, with some difficulty, to chart the inaccuracies and untruths trotted out by Welles, who, for example, praises a production of The Tempest by Max Reinhardt of which there is not the slightest trace.

One is not sure, either, whether to believe Welles's account of his 1936 production of Macbeth in Harlem with black actors. The cast included several African witch doctors, who wanted to put a curse on a critic who had panned the play. Welles told them to go ahead; the next day, he says, the critic was dead.

To judge from the other big piece in the dossier, an interview with Dominique Antoine, who between 1971 and 1976 produced F For Fake and The Other Side Of The Wind, Welles was himself the victim of several curses. The interview with her makes depressing reading, because it puts paid to any hopes one had of ever being able to see Welles's unfinished films — Don Quixote and The Deep. Even The Other Side Of The Wind, which is in a virtually complete state, has become embroiled in a legal battle and a clash of egos. This means it may never be released.

Antoine offers us one of the finest portraits ever painted of Welles. She explains why he has become such an inexhaustible subject of speculation and exegesis: "Even he did not know himself, or no longer knew himself. At the end of his life he could sincerely apply Arkadin's lie [in Confidential Report] to himself: 'I do not know who I am'."

(August 7)

A real square basher

Philippe Dagen

ONE can be pretty certain of finding one or two paintings by Josef Albers (1888-1976) in almost all the world's great collections of 20th century art, as well as in dictionaries and histories of painting. They are always pictures from his series called Homage To The Square, on which he worked from 1950 until his death.

His compositions, then, are familiar to most people. They are usually square-shaped canvases in which three or four squares, each of a different colour, interlock. They are easy to identify and recognise for what they are — examples of geometric abstraction par excellence, a triumph of method and calculation.

At the show now on at the Château de Plieux, in Gascony, there are three series from the Homage To The Square, the first dominated by reds, the second by greys and the third by yellows.

The works are shown on their own merits, not as landmarks, or archetypes, or even sacred icons of a general artistic evolution. And that makes a change from what one has come to expect of exhibition organisers. The paintings are accompanied by preparatory sketches, drawings from Albers' youth, and photographs.

For the first time in France we have been given something approaching an Albers retrospective — his first, even though he died 22 years ago. People are now prepared to accept that he was something more than the mere inventor of the finest geometrical logo of the century. That marks a step forward.

As a result, a number of assumptions about Albers need to be revised, such as the notion that his art resides in the application of a system.

It could be argued that his point of departure — interlocking squares — never varies. But everything depends on their respective sizes, on how they are positioned, on the colours they are given. Slight differences emerge, which can be explained by deceptively minor details. Depending on how central a position is occupied by the smallest square — the only one to be shown in its entirety — the overall composition will seem to be either static or buoyant.

Depending on the colour relationships, the eye seems to see a protuberance or a recess, a vanishing perspective or the illusion of a bulge. The colours have a strong influence on each other.

The highly finished appearance of these paintings is an illusion. Vertical and horizontal lines are rarely vertical or horizontal: they vibrate. Above all, as his sketches show, Albers tirelessly sought the right colour combination. He would paint an approximately square blob on a piece of cardboard and draw lines round it. He would try out a colour, then paint over it. He would hazard juxtapositions until the whole thing gelled.

His "method" consisted basically of optical empiricism. What was his aim in all that? Certainly not to exhaust the spectrum or systematically combine complementary colours, but to achieve the kind of chromatic equilibrium that satisfies one's perception.

Albers was an idealist tempted by mysticism. He wanted to create perfect harmony in a perfect form. In each painting he strove for a visual paradise, for sheer beauty. He was less interested in logical proof than in pure pleasure.

He achieved that goal late in life, when he embarked on his Homage To The Square series. Before that, he had been a country schoolmaster. He taught himself how to draw. Then he went to art schools in Berlin, Essen and Munich. He became interested in glass, particularly stained glass — pure colour through which light is beamed.

In 1920, at the age of 32, an advertising leaflet prompted him to join the Bauhaus. He studied and later taught at the Bauhaus until 1933, when the arrival of the Nazis quickly forced him into exile in the United States.

While at the Bauhaus Albers worked on glass and in photography. He familiarised himself with abstraction and geometry. But his work did not yet have any great originality. It pales in comparison with that of fellow Bauhaus artists such as Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

In 1933 Albers landed a job at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In 1949 he moved to Yale. He became a prolific lecturer. He could easily have lapsed into didacticism, and endlessly rehashed the principles he had established. Instead, at the age of 62 he eased open a door that gave on to a paradise of colour — and never looked back.

Josef Albers, Château de Plieux, Gers. From 3-7pm. Closed Monday. Until September 21

(August 11)

Dance of the dolls

Emmanuel de Roux

IN 1936 the founder of the Surrealist movement, André Breton, organised an exhibition of Surrealist objects in Paris. A kachina doll featured on the exhibition poster. A contemporary photograph by Man Ray shows how important a place in the show was given to these figurines, which were much sought after by almost all members of the Surrealist movement.

The same kachina dolls, which represent the mythical ancestors of Hopi Pueblo Indians in Arizona and New Mexico, are the subject of an exhibition, La Danse des Kachinas, at the Pavillon des Halles in Paris.

Most of the dolls on show belonged to writers and artists in the Surrealist orbit — Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Roberto Matta, Jorge Camacho — or to leading intellectuals such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, who sold some of his dolls to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

Despite constant battles with their Navajo neighbours, the Spanish and then the Americans, the Hopi Indians managed to preserve a certain degree of independence until the middle of the 19th century.

"This explains the exceptional state of preservation of their social customs and religious life," Lévi-Strauss wrote. "Even today, considerable parts of their ritual are a jealously guarded secret . . . impenetrable to ethnologists."

The rich and complicated Hopi pantheon consists of 300-400 kachinas, who are personified by masked and costumed dancers in each village from the end of December to the end of July. The moment a member of the Hopi community dons a spirit's clothes, he is invested with its powers. He acts as an intermediary through whom humans can address prayers to the gods.

The making of a kachina doll is an extremely codified art. Yet there are considerable differences of treatment between, say, the resolutely naturalistic "long-haired kachina", and the simplified forms of the "hunch-backed flute-player", with its phallic symbolism and erotic overtones.

Certain styles predominate at various periods. The oldest pieces date from the 19th century. They consist of rough-hewn little planks covered with painted geometrical signs, where limbs are simply suggested by brush strokes. But the cult probably goes back much further.

The "owl kachina", from the Horst Antes collection, with its carefully arranged geometry of bright colours, was sculpted in about 1910, as was its sister piece in the Lacan collection, which is speckled with darker hues.

Although it is now inevitably tinged with commercialism, the art of kachina dolls lives on. And it will continue to do so just as long as the mythology on which the Hopis' social and moral order is based survives.

When he was in Arizona during the second world war, Breton was looking for "a hieroglyphic interpretation of the world, based on the analogy between human passions and the products of the three kingdoms of the natural world".

He had seen that interpretation in action in the Hopi culture. Lévi-Strauss said of the Hopis: "Everything is linked together: a social disorder or a domestic incident calls into question the system of the universe, whose levels are connected by a host of correspondences."

In Paris after the war Breton told Jean Duché: "The only chance the 20th century European artist has of being able to counter the shrivelling up of sources of inspiration that is caused by rationalism and utilitarianism is to go back to the so-called primitive vision, a synthesis of sensorial perception and mental representation.

"Black sculpture has already been made use of in spectacular fashion. It is the visual art of the Red Indian race, in particular, that today enables us to accede to a new system of knowledge and relationships."

La Danse des Kachinas, Pavillon des Halles, Paris. Closed Monday. Until October 25

(August 16-17)

Le Monde

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GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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A new way of looking at the world

Otto Wichterle

OTTO Wichterle, who has died aged 84, was a visionary scientist who literally made people look at the world in a different way. He developed the hydrophilic or soft contact lens, now worn by about 100 million people throughout the world.

He was not the first to think of contact lenses — the great Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci as usual had the idea first. But Leonardo never tried to make one. René Descartes worked out the mathematics of a rudimentary contact lens but was more interested in magnification. Before the end of the 17th century, people were proposing them as a correction for myopia, and the British astronomer John Herschel described one. The first such lenses were made, of blown glass, in 1888, but until 1954 there were none that could be worn for long. And they were expensive. Wichterle changed all that.

He was born in Prostejov, in what became Czechoslovakia, the son of an entrepreneur who produced agricultural machinery. At school he learned Greek and Latin which, he said, left him with a mind "trained in methodological thinking". In 1935 he began his career at Prague's Institute of Experimental Organic Chemistry. The German dismemberment of the country caused the closure of the institute in 1939. He worked for Bata Shoes before his imprisonment by the Gestapo during 1942-43.

In 1945 he returned to teaching. In 1949, a year after the Communist takeover, he became a professor of macromolecular chemistry at Prague university. Then, in 1952, while on a train between Olomouc and Prague, he observed a fellow-passenger reading about metal implants for eyeball replacement. "It would be much better", Wichterle told the traveller, "to invent some plastic for implants that would be compatible with the surrounding tissue." The fellow passenger turned out to be the secretary of a health ministry commission looking into the use of plastics for medicine.

The encounter was, at first, an embarrassment: Wichterle had to tell the commission that he had no such material, although he was sure he could synthesise some. He suggested that his department start looking at a class of polymers called hydrophilic, or water-loving, gels. His institute took a dim view of the research, but Wichterle found a partner in a small laboratory and, in 1957, he tried a lens in his own eye. It felt rough, burning and unpleasant, but he saw immediately that the gel could be used to correct vision.

In 1958 he was expelled from his university in a political purge. But it did not stop him pursuing his dream. He used his children's Meccano set and the motor from his record-player to build a lens-casting machine on his own kitchen table.

Wichterle: gained little reward for inventing the soft contact lens

In 1961 he had built the world's first soft contact lens. By early 1962 he and his wife Lidia, a doctor, had produced 5,000 of them. Things looked bright — and then the future clouded again. He went abroad, and demonstrated and tested his lenses, although not on patients. "The reaction was unanimous," he later told the Prague Post. "They were a joke, an interesting subject, but without any wider application."

A man from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, went to Prague and bought the rights from the Czech government for $330,000. Nothing much happened until two US patent lawyers from the National Patent Development Corporation arrived in Prague to see one of Wichterle's demonstrations.

"I took a lens out of my eye," said Wichterle, "threw it on the floor, stepped on it, then washed it with my mouth and put it back in my eye." The lawyers were impressed enough to buy the rights for $1 million. In 1967 they in turn found an American buyer in the company Bausch & Lomb, which paid $3 million. Soft contact lenses are now a multi-billion dollar industry.

According to Wichterle's grandson Hynek, now studying neurobiology at Rockefeller university in New York, the inventor never got more than one-tenth of 1 per cent of the original fee paid to the Czech government. Wichterle himself took the loss philosophically: "I would have had problems with what to do with such an amount of money," he said later.

He was the author of 200 patents in organic chemistry, plastics, synthetic fibres and biomedical materials. Elected head of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1989, Wichterle gained huge academic distinction and international recognition, and in 1995 he was still working on synthetic lenses to restore sight after a cataract operation. "To have a new idea is nothing special," he once said. "But to bring that idea into practice — that requires effort."

Tim Radford

Otto Wichterle, chemist, born October 27, 1913; died August 18, 1998

In Brief

DOROTHY West, who has died aged 91, was a novelist, short-story writer, editor and journalist whose career spanned eight decades, although for many years she was remembered mainly for her links with the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural awakening among black Americans that was at its peak between 1923 and 1929.

JULIAN Green, who has died aged 97, defined his writings as "telling myself about myself". The works ranged from novels and plays to an autobiography and a 15-volume Journal, which he maintained was his best work. Time and again in its entries he unflinchingly bared his soul, in the process winning for himself a place among the greatest confessional writers of all time.

THE avant-garde Senegalese film-maker Djibril Diop Mambety, who has died from cancer aged 53, will be best remembered for his classic Touki Bouki (1973). Mambety's stylistic sophistication and passion for poetry, sound and light made him, within his generation, probably his continent's most unconventional and respected film-maker. He is survived by his wife and son.

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Damned if you don't, damned if you do

Susan Faludi reflects on the Clinton sex scandal and wonders how feminism, once found guilty of prudery, is now accused of not being prudish enough

AS THE Clinton sex scandal winds to its bitter end, the real scandal is not what did or didn't happen in the corridors of the Oval Office but how it has been used to justify a lot of political foolishness. Witness the latest misrepresentation of feminism.

When I was in college in the late seventies, the primary drawback to declaring oneself a feminist was the stigma that came with it at the time: prude. Why exactly that was the case, after a decade of second-wave feminists celebrating sexual freedom and admiring their vaginas via speculum, was something of a mystery to me. As a young woman with no interest in convent living, I found this aspect of the feminist label irritating. But I quickly learned that it was no more than that, an irritant — and only in theory. In the practice of everyday life, actual young men dealing with actual young women just as quickly came to the obvious, and happy, conclusion that *feminist = frigid priss* was a spurious equation.

While so many of us grew up personally debunking the myth of the sex-phobic feminist in our own bedrooms, the media clung to that canard the way an exorcist clutches his garlic cloves and crucifix. Anti-feminist press pundits seized every opportunity to decry the women's movement as a band of vice-squad fussbudgets.

When Camille Paglia came along to bash feminism for sexual squeamishness, she was instantly granted Most Favoured Media Status. When young author Katie Roiphe railed against campus feminists' supposed fixation on date rape, she was immediately anointed Soundbite Sally.

All predictable fare, I suppose. It's been going on since suffragists were painted prune-faced spinsters. But then emerged, unforeseen, a whole new, inventive way to skewer feminists on the old sex-averse barb.

I first noticed something was up when I got a phone call from a Newsweek reporter back when the biggest White House sex scandal was the antics of President Clinton's adviser Dick Morris, said to be partial to sucking the toes of a prostitute at an old-line Washington hotel. The reporter wanted me to comment on adultery from "a feminist perspective". Having bought into the myth that feminists are the puritanical police force of sexual morals, she expected me to express outrage at the spectre of infidelity. When I didn't, she was not only frustrated but a little put out at my failure to perform my designated feminist role.

When the Monica Lewinsky brouhaha broke, I got another call from a Newsweek reporter. This guy was downright surly when I didn't endorse burning Clinton at the stake. He began to shout at me over the phone. What kind of feminist was I, anyway, to "suddenly" refuse to condemn male sexual behaviour? "Don't you thing you're being a hypocrite?" he hissed.

The hypocrisy line became instant conventional wisdom. It went like this: feminists embraced Anita Hill when she didn't like Clarence Thomas's sniggering about big-dick porn stars and pubic hairs on Coke cans, but now they are discreetly looking the other way when Clinton is accused of sexual dalliances. Never mind that what feminists were calling for in Hill's case was not suppression of sex but the right of a woman not to have her voice suppressed in a public hearing. Never mind that the women's movement's concerns have always been with the use of sexual harassment to drive women out of the workforce, not with the private acts of two consenting people. Never mind that feminists have never called for the legal or legislative regulation of private sexual behaviour, no matter how repugnant that behaviour may be to one's own personal morality.

No, now feminists' sin was that we had not lived up to our reputation as Victorian avengers. The epithet that was once used to discredit feminism now became our crowning glory, and it was our sacred duty to uphold it or give up the crown. We had failed our legacy as feminists by failing to adhere to the stereotype that had been invented in the first place to hang us. Feminists now found ourselves in the Alice in Wonderland position of having been found guilty twice for two opposite verdicts on the same charge: first we were sentenced for having committed the crime of prudery, then for having not been prudish enough.

IN THIS through-the-looking-glass realm, any feminist who said "Wait a sec, that's not what I was saying at all!" was immediately ground into mincemeat in the media's mandibles. When Gloria Steinem wrote a commonsensical column pointing out the differences between consensual sex and the legal definition of sexual harassment on the job, the media firemen rang the four-alarm bells. Her words threatened to burn the whole house of feminism down, the pundits insisted — the same pundits who been trying to burn that house down themselves for the past several decades.

The New York Times devoted an entire editorial to deploring Steinem's opinion piece and the supposed "dangers" her article had unleashed on an unsuspecting female public. Three days later, former New York Times executive-editor-cum-columnist Abe Rosenthal foamed hysterically (in both senses of the word) against Steinem in his column. "We are talking about acts that could terrorise some women, and lead them to horrified flight, even to their death," he thundered. His evidence: six decades ago, he wrote, his sister Bess had run home after encountering a flasher and had died from pneumonia shortly thereafter.

When I wrote in a small item in the Nation that a more likely suspect in Bess's death was poverty — Abe's sister contracted pneumonia after endless germ-filled subway commutes to and from her cruddy, low-paid secretarial job — I promptly became the next feminist "hypocrite" to be upbraided by the media. Time magazine, among others, promptly singled out this small piece as proof of my having abandoned feminist rectitude in the quest to "make excuses for the president".

As it happened, the whole Time piece was an effort to besmirch feminism on the sex question. The cover story, entitled hopefully "Is Feminism Dead?", illustrated its thesis with a set of pictures that traced the supposed decline of feminism from the bun-and-bonnet suffragist to the self-absorbed and sex-fantasising TV character Ally McBeal. "With its days of flat shoes and fiery protest behind it," Time intoned, "feminism is clearly more attractive to Love now." This, however, was a bad development, according to Time, indicating feminism's detour into a ditz-oid realm of Spice Girls rotating their belly buttons, Bust magazine gals confessing their vibrator thrills, and writer Elizabeth Wurtzel shedding her shirt for the cover of her book, Bitch.

Women want, as do all human beings, to feel they have an effect on the world, that they are engaged and powerful on the public stage. But at century's end, the crushing force of global consumerism has turned the public stage into a display counter. And under that glass, girls take their shirts off because they sense, rightly, that this is the only likely way to exercise "power" in such an age. In this new market economy, the object of the gaze becomes, if not free, then at least, for her 30 seconds of fame, rich and celebrated.

YOUNG women only need look to Time magazine for confirmation of this modern reality. The magazine offered up Ally McBeal's legs for readers' delectation . . . while at the same time cancelling the contract of their one feminist columnist, Barbara Ehrenreich, whose pieces probing deeply into matters of social injustice and economic inequality proved too . . . well, feminist, for the magazine's censorious tastes.

The vanquishing of Barbara Ehrenreich is the real hypocrisy. And also an example of the real repression — the kind that spells actual "dangers" for women's progress, the kind that could indeed "terrorise some women", women who will never get to gyrate under the display glass.

First the media and pop-culture purveyors stamped the label of sex-phobic on feminists, then condemned them for not living up to the stigma. Now they unroll the new red carpet of consumerism and invite young women to prance down its length in their underwear . . . then condemn them for accepting the invitation. Which just speaks to the truth of feminism's oldest and deepest message — until you stop dutifully following cultural orders and learn to think for yourself, you'll never be nothing but somebody's girl.

Susan Faludi is the author of Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women

All you have to do is dream

New research is changing scientific theories about sleep, writes **Jerome Burne**

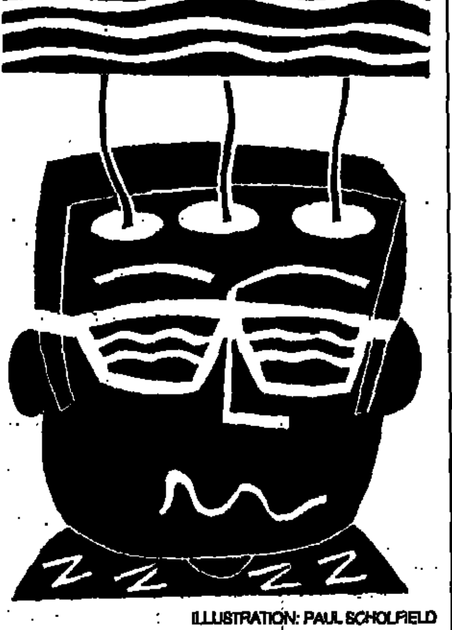


ILLUSTRATION: PAUL SCHOLFIELD

DREAMS are fascinating because they are personal, intimate and totally inaccessible to anyone else. And yet they are bizarre, mysterious and seemingly nothing to do with the dreamer. We still don't understand why we dream, but new findings, presented to the recent Conference on the Scientific Study of Consciousness at Tucson, Arizona, have been upsetting theories.

Text books will tell you that sleep can be divided in REM (Rapid Eye Movement) and non-REM, or slow-wave, sleep. Throughout the night, we move in and out of these two types of sleep. REM is associated with dreaming, but not much happens in non-REM. However, this may have to be revised now that it has been discovered that slow-wave sleep is active in a way we never dreamed of.

"We have developed a new way of recording from the brain," says Professor Bruce McNaughton of Arizona State university. "We can now measure the activity of 100 neurones at a time as a rat runs around a maze." This has allowed McNaughton to enter sci-fi territory. By looking at the patterns made by the firing of just those 100 neurones, he can tell exactly where the rat is in a maze. One pattern emerges when the animal goes past a yellow wall; another when it turns a corner.

But besides opening windows on the waking brain, this new technique may be able to provide the first glimpse of the content of dreams from the outside.

Dreaming, according to the more respected theories, is part of the process of shunting daytime memories into long-term storage. Lessons that students learn during the day are remembered much less well if you stop them dreaming. So would the rats' day-time neurone patterns show up in dreams?

McNaughton first recorded those 100 neurones while the rats were in REM sleep, but found no trace of the patterns. "That was kinda surprising, but when we started recording during the rest of the night, we had an even bigger surprise." The patterns turned up during the slow-wave sleep, the periods when everyone thought not much happened. That wasn't all. "These patterns were being run 20 to 30 times faster than they had in the day."

But other techniques are being used to explore dream secrets. The first PET scans of what goes on in sleeping human brains, made by Professor Alan Hobson of Harvard Medical School, go some way to explain why we have the sort of dreams we do. "We found that one of the most active areas is the amygdala, which is involved in the emotions," he says. "That's why dreams are more often fearful and anxious. Also very busy is an area in the parietal lobe, which is involved in vision and movement. That's why dreams have a hallucinatory quality."

But the most surprising finding was that an area in the frontal lobes which is involved in planning and self-reflection was turned off. "We expected the other two areas from animal studies," Hobson says, "but this was a surprise. It makes sense of the feeling of not being in control in dreams, and it also helps to explain why dreams are so hard to remember, because this area is linked to memory."

There is also a difference in the levels of various brain chemicals between sleeping and waking. One of the signs of sleep is that the level of the neurotransmitter serotonin drops almost to zero. "The trouble is that drugs like Prozac keep serotonin levels artificially high and this can have damaging results," says Hobson. He describes an alarming and increasingly common condition, known as REM sleep disorder, found in certain patients on Prozac. "Their sleep pattern is totally disturbed," he says. "They show REM sleep all through the night and they start acting out their dreams.

"Normally when we are in REM sleep our major muscles are paralysed, but in these patients the block comes off and they may have fights with the wardrobe or try to attack their partner."

Dr Stephen La Berge of Stanford university has been exploring the curious phenomenon of lucid dreams. "With a bit of training it is possible to go to sleep, intending to become aware that you are dreaming and actually control and change the dream while remaining asleep," he explains. This allows a dreamer in the laboratory, hooked up to electrodes measuring eye movements, to signal to the experimenter that he is conscious.

La Berge says: "The sort of question you can use it to answer is: do people dream in real time? You agree before the person goes to sleep that he will signal with his eyes when he starts counting to 10 and again when he stops. Then you can check if the subjective dreaming for 10 seconds actually takes 10 seconds. And we've found that it does."

It is hard to square Hobson's new claims that the executive part of the brain is turned off during REM sleep with La Berge's claims that you can be conscious and keep dreaming. Sleep is still pretty mysterious.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
August 30 1998

Bhopal was a bustling state capital of about 1 million people before its name became synonymous with the world's worst industrial accident. On the night of December 2, 1984, toxic fumes leaked from a chemicals plant and killed, maimed or injured more than half the city's population. Now, at last, the official report on the accident's medical legacy is about to be published.
Fred Pearce reports from Madhya Pradesh

Corrosive legacy of Bhopal disaster

ONE SUNDAY night, 14 years ago, a choking white cloud swept through the old quarters of Bhopal from the Union Carbide pesticides plant on the city's outskirts. The methyl isocyanate and hydrogen cyanide gases in the cloud burned and scarred the lungs of all who breathed it. On the Monday morning, more than 2,000 lay dead in the streets. Tens of thousands more were left with wrecked lungs and eyes seared by the gas. And in the 5,000 days since the world's worst industrial disaster, at least another 5,000 have died from their injuries.

An official report on the medical legacy of the disaster, drawing on data collected over the 10 years following the accident and due to be published later this year, will reveal that the agony goes on as epidemics of tuberculosis, emphysema, asthma-like symptoms and cataracts ravage the 500,000 people who were caught by the cloud.

Dr M P Dwivedi, director of the report set up by the Indian Council of Medical Research in Delhi, says that almost one in 14 people in the worst affected zones of the city now suffer from TB. This rate — three times the national average — continues to rise.

On the streets around the plant today, the slums seem busy. But enter almost any of the homes in the mostly Muslim quarters near the plant and you find a world where victims rarely go out for want of breath, energy or hope for the future.

Chand Khan worked in Union Carbide's workshop, but was at home nearby on the night the cloud escaped. "I woke and smelled what I thought was burning chillies," he recalls, but soon discovered that his home was filled with a white cloud. Choking, he grabbed his two children, aged five years and one month, and ran with them into the night. After half a kilometre, still inside the cloud, he collapsed. When he woke he found his baby was dead. The older child coughed for four years before he, too, died.

Today, Chand Khan, 43 years old, weighs only seven stone (45kg). It hurts to eat, his vision is blurred and he can barely breathe. He has not worked for eight years. Union Carbide, in a deal reached with the Indian Supreme Court in 1989, agreed a final settlement of $470 million as compensation for Bhopal's victims, with individual payments ranging from virtually nothing to a maximum of 400,000 rupees (about $10,000). Chand Khan has spent his compensation (about $1,100) on doctors' bills. Now, he says, he has nothing to live for: "I wake at night and ask my wife to give me poison."

His story is typical, says Dwivedi, who this month is finally writing up the results of the study which is set to be unequivocal and damning: "Union Carbide keeps saying that there are no long-term or delayed effects from the gas, and that only a few people were seriously injured. My data shows they are wrong."

Union Carbide's old pesticides plant is today rusting and encroached by weeds. The factory walls are daubed with graffiti: "Bhopal = Hiroshima", says one. Its poison lingers on underground. Turning into an alley in the shadow of the plant, the reek of solvent from a pump where a line of women and children fill buckets and kettles with water is unmistakable. These and some 250 other wells in the area have a small red sign, erected last year, declaring that the water is "unfit for drinking". But it is drunk. There is nothing else.

Since the accident, more than 300,000 people have been awarded compensation for injuries, though 500,000 people were covered by the cloud, says Dwivedi, of whom 95 per cent suffered from it. About 50,000 people still suffer, according to the International Medical Commission on Bhopal, an independent volunteer organisation of physicians and public health experts set up in response to appeals from community groups in the city. The only good news from Dwivedi's report is that the predicted plague of blindness has not materialised, though among the over-40s the rate of cataracts is now 10 times the national average.

The day before the accident, Mohammed Rashid rode home a bicycle loaded with four times his own weight in wheat. He has not ridden a bike since. "The chest pains are so bad I sometimes feel that my heart will burst," he says. His medical record book contains stamps for more than 300 visits to doctors since the disaster.

"The doctor says I am a liability to my family and there is nothing he can do for me." So he devised his own form of relief. A large pair of tongs that he squeezes against the front and back of his chest when the pain is at its worst. He once broke a rib doing this, he says.



The morning after: more than 2,000 lay dead in Bhopal's streets after the disaster PHOTO RAGHUFA

Shaheen was a healthy girl of 12 when the disaster struck. Now aged 26, she complains of palpitations, chest pains, numbness, fever, giddiness, aversions to both noise and light and a constant feeling "as if I've been beaten up". She menstruates only irregularly and has constant vaginal secretions. "Most women here have the same kinds of problems, but don't want to talk about it," says her doctor, Rachana Pandey, who works at the Sambhavna Clinic, established four years ago after an advertisement in the Guardian raised $80,000 from readers.

"The problem of breathlessness is worsening," says Pandey. "Many patients can barely walk now." Nobody knows the total number of people who have died from the effects of the toxic cloud. Union Carbide quotes the state government's figure of 3,800. But 15,000 people made compensation claims for dead loved ones, and awards have been made to just over 5,000 of them. In many cases, there were no loved ones left to make a claim. An entire encampment of Gypsies was wiped out.

Three years ago, the local government welfare commissioner listed 8,017 deaths as "exposure-related". And the toll continues to rise. Dwivedi says the annual death rate in the affected communities is still between 500 and 1,000 times higher than it is in neighbouring slums.

The most obvious explanation for the wide range of symptoms suffered by gas victims is that the toxic assault of the gas permanently damaged their immune systems. But Thomas Baillie, professor of medicinal chemistry at the University of Washington in Seattle, offers another explanation, which involves rogue activity by a usually beneficial chemical of the body, glutathione.

Found in the lining of the lungs glutathione mops up toxins to form compounds, known as conjugates, that pass through the body before being excreted. In animal studies, however, Baillie has found that conjugates made with methyl isocyanate, one of Bhopal's toxic gases, are unstable and may break apart dumping the toxins in various parts of the body. So glutathione, the body cleanser, may inadvertently become the conduit for methyl isocyanate to attack organs.

Another macabre symptom uncovered in Dwivedi's study is an imprint etched on the eyes of many of those who ran through the streets that night. "As they ran, the gas hurt their eyes, so they shut them," he says, "just leaving a slit to see through. Today that slit, an opaque line on their corneas, is permanent."

There is also growing evidence that the gas has left its mark on children born since the disaster. Dr S Shrivasdava, a local GP, says: "Babies are not growing properly."

Evidence from genetic tests, says Dwivedi, indicates changes to chromosomes in the affected population. "We suspect there will be more lung and throat cancers in this and future generations. If you come back here in 20 or 30 years time, you will still see people suffering the consequences."

If you want to help the Bhopal victims, you can contribute to the Sambhavna Clinic. Send cheques made payable to The Pesticides Trust/Bhopal Medical Appeal, to the Pesticides Trust at Eurolink Centre, 49 Effra Road, London SW2 1BZ, UK

Hospital to salve consciences

UNION Carbide's final legacy to the people of Bhopal is a 330-bed hospital set to open in January. But many local doctors have already dismissed it as an expensive, conscience-salving white elephant. And a solicitor in London, who has acted as the trustee of the Bhopal Hospital Trust, funded by Union Carbide, is facing Indian court action after the death of a 13-year-old child on the construction site last November exposed the presence of children working there.

The Trust was set up in a deal with the Indian Supreme Court to make use of the US company's assets in India. The sole trustee, until his death early this year, was Sir Ian Percival, Margaret Thatcher's first Solicitor General. Following his death, the mantle passed to his son, Robert.

The Trust has so far built one clinic near the factory and plans to open three more later this year to treat the "very high proportion of the people of Bhopal" that Robert Percival says continue to suffer the after-effects of the gas cloud. But its biggest project is the hospital, which covers 80 acres and occupies a greenfield site 7km from the disaster zone.

Percival says the hospital is "the one good thing to come out of the tragedy". But many doctors say it will do little for the hundreds of victims who queue outside their clinics in search of relief from their debilitating symptoms. "People need community-based help, counselling and home treatment," says Rachana Pandey of the city's Sambhavna Clinic. Paul Cullinan, a doctor at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London and a member of the International Medical Commission on Bhopal, says: "The poor, chronically ill victims, who are unlikely ever to recover, need support, not medicine."

In March, R G Pandey, a local works inspector, wrote to Percival's trust with a list of 14 children he had found working on the site. All told, he wrote, "there were about 200 of them".

Robert Percival dismisses the allegations: "I am assured by the contractors that there was not a word of truth in it."

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Letter from France Jacqueline Karp Gendre

Pride of the fleet

THEY came in their thousands. An estimated 100,000 to La Rochelle. Another 50,000 the following day to the Médoc. And on a *chassé croisé* weekend as well.

Chassé croisé is the term the French use to refer to the weekend when the *juilletistes* (those who take their holidays in July) cross paths with the *aoûtiens*, the August crowd. But the ballet comparison stops there. This is no light-footed *pas de deux*. Rather a mass two-way migration, raising accident figures and jamming minor roads as people search desperately for *bison futé* (clever bison) routes to avoid motorway congestion.

Our local spin-off is hours of queueing for the Royan-Le Verdon ferry across the Gironde to the Pointe du Grave, supposedly a quick cut to avoid Bordeaux for those on their way to the Médoc. This year, the extra thousands were here for a different reason. They flocked to admire the biggest passenger ship in the world, the France. Starting this summer, Norwegian Cruise Line, the company that bought, transformed and refitted the 315-metre-long liner in 1980, is running wine-tasting cruises along the French coast.

She may have been rebaptised the SS Norway and be registered in Nassau, but no French newspaper has yet used that name. Here, she is still the "France", the transatlantic liner built in St Nazaire in 1961 and launched by Madame de Gaulle. Captain Kérignard, the ship's last French captain, now employed as a guide taking tourists out to circle the ship, recounts that in the old days they always carried a coffin large enough for the general, just in case.

The liner used to run from Le Havre to New York; then, thwarted by financial difficulties, it was sold in 1980. No visitors are allowed on board, but that doesn't deter the crowds. From dawn till dusk, small craft cross over, laden with camera-carrying tourists. Bookings must be made weeks ahead.

Those who can't get across the estuary try other tacks: sailing boats, windsurfing, inflatable dinghies, jet-skis. But, thankfully, not many planes — 15 people died when a private aircraft viewing the ship in Quiberon Bay, off the Breton coast, crashed into a plane on a regular flight to Lorient.

Ships leaving the docks on the Verdon side have to cross the estuary in order to follow the safe deep channel out to the Atlantic on the Charente Maritime side. Here the coastal path provides kilometres of good viewing for the rest of us. And we take full advantage of it.

The first time the liner called, in July, we took the car. We missed her and spent two hours in a traffic jam getting home. This time we knew better: we took bikes. Last time she set off early. This time we did, too. By 6pm, a ragged but ever-increasing line of people was already installed in deckchairs or sitting on the parched summer grass, waiting for their dreamboat to get under way. Many came equipped: binoculars, cameras, tripods. All ages turned up: babies, grandmothers, adults engaged in knowledgeable conversation about tides, kids falling off bikes or peeing over the edge of the cliff while waiting for "Le Titanic! Le Titanic!" to pass. As the sun went down, the evening breeze got distinctly cooler, but no one moved.

The wait was long. For well over an hour, she remained firmly moored to the quayside. To pass the time, we watched the acrobatics of waiting windsurfers and seagulls through our binoculars.

From afar, she was clearly visible with the naked eye, but we couldn't judge her size. Then, as she edged away from her moorings and approached us, she seemed to rise out of the turbulent water and dominate the estuary. The Verdon ferry, crossing in front of her bows, going about its everyday business as if nothing was happening, looked diminutive beside this ocean-going juggernaut.

We waited two hours to see her glide swiftly and silently past us, her graceful body a Nordic midnight-blue, her superstructure chalk white, so huge and close that you could almost reach out and touch her.

Lights shone on the top deck, but no one was about. Everyone at dinner no doubt, or sleeping off the Château Margaux. A few of us waved, but no Leonardo di Caprio leaned over the rail to wave back.

A Country Diary

Jeremy Smith

STORA Stofallet, Sweden: Breakfast conversation centred upon the bottle of duty-free gin. Its label proclaimed the inclusion of no fewer than 10 botanicals. Yesterday we chewed fresh stems from angelica plants growing by a stream near the lake. Under the small birch trees further up the slope, we had tripped over juniper shrubs tangled among the bilberries.

The woodlands were full of interest. The older birch ceps were full of grubs, but the many smaller specimens contributed to our next meal. Flowers were all around us — red geranium, yellow goldenrod, mauve arctic thistle, and on mossy rocks the delightful tiny twin white flowers of linnaea. In one place the lush foliage had been flattened where an elk with her last year's calf had recently slept. Mosquitoes followed us in clouds, and descended voraciously every time we paused. But the birds were disappointingly few at first, and our local companions spoke of a silent spring. The migrants had arrived on time, but the season was late this year and they encountered cool conditions, with snow still on the ground and few insects. As we climbed into the tundra beyond the trees, a resplendent golden plover cried plaintively as it circled above us, and a buzzard soared in the distance.

Later, in a traditionally styled Saami kota or teepee, we lay on reindeer skins upon the floor of birch twigs, furthering our appreciation of the 10 botanicals. A fire held the insects at bay. We idly watched the smoke escaping into the midnight twilight through the opening at the top, past the fat salmon trout being smoked for tomorrow's lunch.



The Palio is important to the Sienese, but animal rights activists say the course is dangerous

Italian TV joins outcry against Palio cruelty

John Hooper in Rome

THE PALIO, the twice-yearly horse race around the main square of Siena, has come under particularly searing criticism after two horses died in the wake of this month's event.

Animal welfare groups have long demanded that the race, which dates from the 13th century, be abolished or reformed. Since 1975 37 horses have died.

But this year, amid claims of doping, critics have been joined by Italy's state-run broadcasting corporation, the RAI, which received numerous calls of complaint after its live broadcast.

The RAI showed the pile-up after which a seven-year-old bay, Lobis Andrea, was put down. But it also caught another horse, Tuareg, struggling on riderless with a dangling and damaged hoof, and those images seem to have provoked most revulsion. Tuareg reportedly succumbed to an infection a few days later.

A member of the RAI's executive board, Giampiero Gamaleri, called for the "reduction and possibly the elimination from the Palio of any violence towards people or animals".

Death and injury are almost inevitable in the Palio. The jockeys ride bareback and their mounts have to cope with a sand-covered course with tight corners. Animal rights activists say the thoroughbred horses are not strong enough to check themselves at the bends.

This year it was also claimed that the horses were drugged. Franco Zeffirelli, the film and theatre director and a longtime critic of the Palio, said they were "stuffed with dope to make them 'fly'". He recalled that in 1996 two horses were destroyed. "One of the horses that was put down was buried immediately in quicklime which, as is well known, destroys any trace of performance-enhancing substances."

Siena's mayor, Pierluigi Piccini, accused critics of bias against the city: "Every year, 186 horses die on Italian race courses, whereas it is two or three years since an animal died in the Palio."

The race, in which each of the 10 horses represents a parish, arouses passion among the Sienese. The jockey blamed for the pile-up this month had to take refuge in a church from angry inhabitants of the parish whose horse died.

The race's importance to the city has prompted some critics to call for it to be changed rather than abolished. The Italian Animal Rights League has suggested that Siena thinks up another sort of race.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

IS MY hand in any danger if I interrupt the operation of my microwave and reach inside?

WHEN you open the door a switch automatically disconnects the magnetron that generates the microwaves: the microwaves vanish almost instantaneously and leave no residue. The only hazard is the obvious one of the hot food. — *Professor Harvey Rutt, University of Southampton*

WHICH was the first country, and which was the last, to give the vote to women? Have any countries always been equal in their voting rights?

NEW Zealand granted voting rights to women in 1893, followed by Australia in 1902, Finland in 1906 and Norway in 1913. But the first self-governing area ever to do so was Y Wladfa, the Welsh settlement in Patagonia, between 1867 and 1869 (until the area was annexed by Argentina). In 1869 Wyoming Territory gave the vote to women, and they retained it when Wyoming became a state in 1890.

A Women's Suffrage Act was passed by the Manx parliament in 1881, and in the then colony of South Australia in 1894. As to the last country to give women the vote — some have yet to do so — but of those now in the European Union the last seems to have been Greece in 1952. Shockingly, women were not enfranchised in France until 1944. — *Craig Binns, Glasgow*

IN ENGLAND, Lamb and Bacon are common surnames, but few people are called Beef. In France, Le Boeuf seems to be a fairly common surname but not L'Agneau or Le Bacon. Why?

THE etymological origins of the words "lamb" and "bacon" lie in Old German, which arrived in England during the Saxon invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries. They were used in the Anglo-Saxon language until the Norman invasion in 1066, along with the bovine descriptors, "cow" and "bull".

From 1066 until around the end of the 14th century, Norman French and Latin were spoken by the ruling élite. Hence the words we use in modern English for cooked meats — beef, mutton and ham — come from the French *boeuf*, *mouton* and *jambon*.

The peasants were the ones who looked after, killed and prepared these animals for their Norman lords, and so we describe live animals with the Anglo-Saxon words cow, sheep and pig.

Names which include the words "cow" and "bull" are very common (for example, Cowan, Cowburn, Cowland, Cowley, Cowking, plus Bull, Bulman and Bullock). I cannot say why l'Agneau is not a common surname in France, but the English surname Agnew is quite common. — *Simon Wilkinson, London*

Any answers?

IF THE millennium bug were to cause a large number of catastrophes and fatalities, would it be possible to prosecute individuals and companies involved in the computer and software business? — *Robin Oakley-Hill, West Kingsdown, Kent*

WHAT determines whether a tree becomes oil, coal or fossil? — *Gerard Mackay, Nesscliffe, Shropshire*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Ringing the changes from Down Under

Something wonderfully strange has happened to theatre in Australia, writes **Lyn Gardner**

NOTHING prepared me two years ago for a show called All Of Me by a little-known Australian circus-cum-theatre company called Legs On The Wall. If the actors had walked on water I couldn't have been more astonished. Never had bodies suspended in air seemed so meaningful.

This year they are back with **Under the Influence**. Throughout this exhilarating 70 minutes, one actor plays "cause" while another is "effect". A couple are sleeping in bed. He rolls away from her, rejecting her in his unconscious. But every time he succeeds in getting away, the woman is hoisted on top of him again, her limbs smothering his body.

Edinburgh this year is full of evidence of how far the boundaries between theatre, dance, movement and acrobatics have been blurred Down Under.

In Donna Jackson's fine performance piece, **Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love**, episodes of open camshaft surgery are punctuated by lyrical interludes swinging on a rope that says more than words could ever express about the out-of-body nature of desire and love. In Desoxy's **98.4 Per Cent DNA — Being Human**, the slam of body upon body is used to consider the philosophical and emotional ramifications of aquatic ape theory — yes, that's right, aquatic ape theory.

These shows have three things in common: all are created through a devised process; all are fired by the performers' own emotions; and the actors are as likely to have been trained at circus school as drama school. It is the big top edging towards the theatre, not the other way round. Text is the most recent introduction to this work, and in the case of Legs On The Wall and Desoxy, is still the weakest part of the performance.

Daniel Witton, of Desoxy, traces Australia's physical theatre boom to a visit by a group of Beijing acrobats in the early eighties. By 1985, when Britain's idea of circus was still a sad lion in a cage, Australia was leading the way in new circus with Circus Oz, The Melbourne Women's Circus and Rock 'N' Circus.

The impetus was as much about politics as performance — Legs On The Wall was founded by a magician, an acrobat and a social worker. The problem, as Kate Champion, who directs Under The Influence, points out, was to find a way to bring meaning to the double backflip. Ten years on, many of the companies who grew out of the new circus movement have achieved an amazing maturity and sophistication. As Champion says: "It's incredible what a trained body with an intelligent mind can do."



It's those backpackers again . . . circus has turned Australian theatre upside down PHOTO: MURDO MacLE[illegible]

But if the circus skills explosion accounts in part for Australia being one step ahead of the rest in this kind of work, the natural ease of many antipodeans with their bodies is also a bonus. Australian dancers are always much bolder than their British counterparts and, as anyone who has ever seen the Sydney Dance Company will know, performances are likely to include a level of physical skill and acrobatics undreamt of in Britain.

Chenine Bhathena, a British producer who scours Australia for work to bring back to Europe, believes that the development of the genre is part of Australia's search for its own cultural identity.

"A lot of text-based theatre is still imported; the home-grown textual theatre is scant. With no history of text, people looked for other ways to express themselves.

"Physical theatre is just one strand of a movement that includes multimedia and interactive work that is much more advanced than it is here. Of course, not all of it is good. But there are some interesting developments."

Yet, like many British physical theatre companies who have found the tug of text irresistible, Australian companies also seem drawn to the spoken word. The irony is that it is sometimes easier to invest a somersault with emotion than it is to put real meaning into words.

As the performance of Under The Influence proves, the body alone can be an achingly expressive emotional tool. The arch of back-against-back of bodies catapulting over each other can take ideas about love and dependence into the realm of the metaphysical. It's only when you start using words about love as a drug that it seems banal.

Dramatic licence

THEATRE
Michael Billington

WHAT is the artist to do in the age of stereotyping? Sarah Kane's answer is to keep moving. In Blasted, Phaedra's Love and Cleansed, she established a reputation for neo-Jacobean violence and excess. Now in Crave, premiered by Paines Plough at the Edinburgh Traverse, she comes up with a virtually actionless piece of word-music. Like it or not — and mostly I do — you have to respect her desire to escape media pigeonholing.

But what exactly is Kane up to? Four actors confront us in chairs. They have no names or identifiable characters. What they do have, as they turn towards each other, are visible relationships. An anguished young woman (called C in the Methuen text) is trying to free herself from an older man (A). Meanwhile a mature woman (M) terrified of passing time is both drawn to and repelled by a younger man (B). At one point people swap chairs so that the two women end up next to each other. Otherwise what we get for 43 minutes is a play for voices: a cry of pain in which language is used partly for musical effect.

The piece is a radical departure for Kane without being wholly original. Beckett's gaunt shadow broods over the evening, not least in the patterned speech, in which you can actually hear the rhythms of Godot. At another point, as all four characters emit a one-syllable scream, you seem to be watching a Bacon painting come to life.

Though full of echoes, the play also has something peculiar to Kane: a strange mixture of anguish and lyricism. Even in Cleansed there was a palpable belief in redemptive love. Here it is love itself that is seen as a source of obsession, occupation, ownership and breakdown: the declared aim, expressed significantly by the two women, is "To be free of memory" — "Free of desire". It is this constant tension between the demands of emotional intimacy and the dignity of solitude that gives the play its genuine dynamic.

The obvious accusation is that it's a play for radio. Why, people may ask, should you pay the babysitter simply to watch a seemingly actionless drama? But Vicky Featherstone's production eloquently answers that by using the actors' body-lanaguage to maximum effect: she shows that even the way you sit in a chair is revealing. Sharon Duncan-Brewster as the younger woman twists and writhes like a trapped snake as Alan Williams's older lover lengthily describes the cloying demands of affection. And Ingrid Craigie as the older woman who claims "I never met a man I trusted" constantly turns both towards and away from Paul Thomas Hickey as the boy who satisfies her needs but who leaves her emotionally cold. On the radio, the play could easily be abstract music: in the theatre it is full of neurotic tension.

Admittedly, there are times when Kane strains too hard for poetic effect ("What I sometimes mistake for ecstasy is simply the absence of grief"). But the play also has a self-puncturing earthiness and proves something important about new British drama: its total fluidity of form. In the recent past, dramatists, however diverse, shared certain formal assumptions. Now they re-invent the structure every time they sit down to write. The effect is liberating rather than anarchic; and, in the case of Kane, it means she has been able to escape from the imprisoning image of her as a lurid sensationalist. After Crave, she is able to walk free.

"Here comes Bertolt Brecht and we expect your essays to be handed in by Friday," runs the little ditty, sung to a ukulele, at the start of the show. But the joy of Kathryn Hunter's production, jointly presented by comedy duo The Right Size and the Almeida Theatre, is that uninhibited theatricality displaces schoolroom didacticism.

Lee Hall's version of Brecht's 1940s Finnish folk tale **Mr Puntila and His Man Matti** at the Traverse certainly gets across the basic point: that rich landowner Puntila is a bullying martinet when sober and a reckless philanthropist when drunk. In his cups he treats his chauffeur Matti as an equal, offers him the hand of his daughter Eva and hires communists and cripples to work on his estate: in the cold light of sobriety he reverts to the role of class tyrant.

Brecht's argument is that we should be masters of our own affairs. But Hall's highly intelligent version also makes it not just a play about the boss class's dualities but about human responsibility. Puntila's vice is a refusal to accept the consequences of his actions. It is the level-headed Matti who constantly points out that promises are nothing without contracts, and who demonstrates to Eva the deprivations of marriage to an underling.

Hamish McColl and Sean Foley as Puntila and Matti confirm that comics often make very good actors. And Hunter's production, confirms once again that Brecht can be a source of enlightened fun.

The man who was robbed

COMEDY
Phil Daoust

"*FOR* years I've been the funny bloke with his nose pressed up against the glass," the huge, sweaty, revolting-permed Johnny Vegas tells the punters at the Gilded Balloon, "and now I'm sitting in the restaurant of recognition."

He's only half joking. Vegas's life was transformed by last year's Edinburgh debut. Shortlisted for the Perrier, he was hailed as the rightful winner when it went to the League Of Gentlemen. His UK tour was a sell-out and now he's shooting a TV special for Channel 4. One thing would make it complete. And doesn't he know it.

"I never thought I'd hear myself saying this," he yells, "but Perrier, let me win! Let me win!"

God knows whether Vegas really does want the prize — there's quite a cachet to being The Man Who Was Robbed. But last year's acclaimed performance was clearly no one-off. The new show is a gut-wrenching roller-coaster of anger, self-aggrandisement and chip-on-shouldery, with the occasional detour into mock lyricism whenever the subject turns to pottery, Vegas's one true love.

One moment he'll be moaning about how ugly he is: "I didn't get the birds-and-bees story off me dad. He reckoned it was like putting a fire escape on the side of a fucking bungalow."

The next he'll boast about his pulling power. Or he'll flaunt his new-found marketability — "I'm proud to say that I'm brought to you tonight by Hob Nob biscuits" — then complain he's got too successful.

It would be nice to think this shambolic air was wholly intentional — Vegas slowly unveiling his schizo personality — but it looks more like he threw in anything that would get a laugh. It doesn't matter. The material is first-rate, the self-mockery all the funnier for its tinge of sadness.

And as a performer Vegas is compelling: an in-yer-face, no-surrender, mountain of a man . . . Bernard Manning on PCP, if you can bear to imagine it. You'd have to laugh, even if the material was crap. God knows what he'd do if you didn't.

Johnny Vegas: his own favourite for the Perrier award

Changing guard at the Palace

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

LADY MARY, the Queen's cousin, is what Dennis Skinner calls a hanger-on. She is hanging on like a good 'un at 81.

To my surprise and delight she turned up in ITN's documentary **After Diana**, the only programme on Channel 5's Diana Night you could watch without plaiting your toes. This is the first we've heard of Lady Mary because she has never spoken in public before. Unaccustomed as she is to public speaking, what she says has the freshness of a new laid egg.

The Palace neither helped nor hindered the making of this programme. It's a measure of ITN's desperation and ingenuity that they finally found this unworldly octogenarian to speak up for the royal family. Derek Draper, the disgraced lobbyist, appeared for Labour and Lord Tebbit for the Tories. An exhilaratingly eccentric trio.

Lady Mary's mother and the Queen Mother were sisters so she has her quota of Bowes-Lyon charm.

After Diana was a progress report on the impact of her death on the royal family. At the first impact, they went to earth. As the commentary said, "Eight hours after Diana was pronounced dead, the Windsors, including Princes William and Harry, attended a Sunday morning service at Crathie Church. No prayers were said for Diana by the visiting preacher, no mention of her name. The following days were spent entertaining friends. There were daily picnics and grouse shoots on the Balmoral estate."

I don't suppose it was put quite this bluntly to Lady Mary, but it was put to her. She said, "They were obviously horrified and upset about it . . . but, if you have dogs or small children in a house, life has to go on for them."

It felt like stepping on a sleeping grouse. For a moment the air was full of squawks and feathers. Dogs? They stayed at Balmoral to look after the *dogs*?

Meanwhile, back at the Palace, the bare flagpole seemed to be giving the finger to a hostile crowd. Lord Blake was told that Prince Andrew strongly opposed flying the Royal Standard at half mast. A gulf gaped between them and us. Sir Antony Jay, who has made two documentaries about the royal family, said it was like the shifting of tectonic plates.

It was Tony Blair who said the few necessary and touching words about the people's princess (well rehearsed like all good impromptus). The Queen returned on the eve of the funeral and spoke simply, as she said, from her heart. The day after the funeral the prime minister joined her at Balmoral. There was a great deal to discuss. It had been a damned close run thing.

Lord Tebbit was scathing about Tony Blair's involvement. "There is no one more astute than the prime minister at getting into the picture. I don't know if Mr Hague was wise to make the point that Mr Blair was making political capital but, of course, he was." The prime minister will be at Balmoral again for the anniversary of Princess Diana's death. "He wants to squeeze the last drop of juice from that lemon for his own political advantage."

(When Lord Tebbit is putting an energetic boot in like this, I remember his poor feet. He was being dragged out of the bombed ruins of the Brighton Grand Hotel feet first on TV and his soles were as white as lemon soles.)

The warm working relationship which has developed between the Palace and the prime minister must be beneficial to both. It was said of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire that she gave him sex appeal and he gave her class.

Jack Lemmon was running through his career with Mark Cousins in **Scene by Scene** (BBC2). Lemmon is 73 and, as Noël Coward said, he's relieved if his friends last through lunch.

He talked of Bob Mitchum ("who is no longer with us"), Rita Hayworth ("I'm the only one left of the whole damn film"), Sinatra and Danny Kaye ("Everybody I'm talking about has passed away"), Fred MacMurray ("Bless his soul, he's not with us any more"), and Harry Ray ("I miss him to this day") who made him up to look like his mother in Some Like It Hot.

Lemmon: "Charlie Lang was the photographer."

Cousins: "He died last week."

Lemmon: *"There's another gone!"*

By now we were all weeping with laughter. I think you have to be old to enjoy it.

X marks the spot

CINEMA
Gaby Wood

THE X-FILES, an award-winning cult TV series and now a film, is the brain child of writer and producer Chris Carter. Carter was a California kid who had his teenage illusions shattered by Watergate. He studied journalism (like the heroes of that scandal) and, after lying dormant on Surfing magazine for 13 years, he hit us in 1993 with the X-Files, a programme fuelled by extreme, almost contortionist conspiracy theories.

Those not intimate with the TV show will perhaps only know of its zeal for all things paranormal. Each episode hinges on something otherworldly, so that the series's repertoire of unbelievable phenomena is extensive. But the feature film is grounded in a different kind of conspiracy, in the very earthly secret plots of the US government. On TV this fear was present in varying degrees — "people don't feel they're being told the truth," is the producers' regular line (to which Lewinskyites might add, "and they don't seem to mind"). Here that fear is prominent — the film's influences lie somewhere between All The President's Men and Superman, and it should attract a wider audience because of that. The X-Files, we now see, is what happens when Nixon's children grow up.

Our heroes and guides are Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), two FBI agents rendered marginal by their fight against the extraterrestrial enemy. Mulder is a believer, whose sister was abducted by aliens as a child. Scully is a medically trained sceptic, who thought she could "make a difference" at the FBI. Their job, as they have defined it, is to seek out that which "cannot be programmed, categorised, or easily referenced". These slippages in the system are what make up the X-Files.


Alien hunters . . . David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson in the X-Files

The film is calculated not to repeat or summarise the series (unlike Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, which held little interest for fans), and when we meet the duo, it's clear that they're seasoned allies. They work so well together, in fact, that those in charge do all they can to separate them. Scully is about to be transferred. The X-Files have been closed.

The movie is directed by Rob Bowman, who made 25 episodes with the rest of the team. The show already looks slick, but the film pulls off something grander. The executive producer worked on Jurassic Park and Return Of The Jedi, which gives some idea of the scale: The X-Files really fills the screen.

The casting is a combination of the usual favourites and surprising stars. Martin Landau, the skeletal villain of Hitchcock's North By Northwest, plays Mulder's surreptitious supporter (it may be the inclusion of Landau that prompted a homage to Hitchcock's film, in which the pair are chased through cornfields by helicopters).

The enemy Mulder and Scully don't yet know they're fighting is a virus, a "plague to end all plagues", depicted as a flying, roaring, slurpy thing with a just-discernible face. It jumps on to humans, shoots black worms under their skin and transforms their bodies into something from Gray's Anatomy encased in lime jello. As far as I can make out, the virus is a "colonising force", waiting to be reconstituted when aliens invade the planet. The virus was the original inhabitant of the Earth, long before us weaklings ever got here. Now it has "mutated into a new extra-terrestrial biological entity". And even more scarily, the US government, plus a congress of unidentified international mafiosi, are "secretly negotiating a planned Armageddon".

Mulder and Scully find all the marks of a cover-up: a bomb planted in the wrong building, the morgue declared off-limits from on high, space-age tents in the middle of nowhere, strange goings-on from Texas to Antarctica.

Like all good conspiracy theories, it only makes apparent sense, and rarely even that. Who's in cahoots with whom and why? Are the politicians negotiating with the aliens? One of the strongest features in the movie is the suppressive force that is the FBI. In the course of several hearings, a stern chief played by Blythe Danner (Gwyneth Paltrow's mum) refuses to believe Scully's testimony. Her intransigence is terrifying. She is of course the enemy, though she appears as the neutral judge, and it's one of The X-Files more persuasive paranoias that, faced with these people, no proof is truly incontrovertible.

But because the uniformed protocol is so well played, it's easy to miss the fact that the film is based on a presupposed belief in the paranormal by all parties. The question is never whether aliens exist, the issue is that some people are open about their belief (or knowledge), and some people are covering it up. There are no true sceptics in this story — everyone knows about the alien virus. The enemies are those who are helping it propagate.

Rattle goes with a bang

PROMS
Andrew Clements

SIMON RATTLE has been saying his farewells to the orchestra with which he has shared so much success for 19 years.

A Beethoven cycle in Birmingham Symphony Hall has been completed, to be repeated at the Salzburg festival; at the end of the month they are due to return to Birmingham for a performance of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony.

The conductor brought the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to the Proms for another goodbye — his last appearance at the Albert Hall for the foreseeable future as the music director of a British orchestra — bringing the pinnacle of that Beethoven journey, the Ninth Symphony.

This was Beethoven memorably cut from the contemporary mould — the orchestra uses modern instruments, but Rattle informs his performance with the lessons he has learned from the period instrument movement.

It is the kind of synthesis that conductors like Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Charles Mackerras also exploit so tellingly — textures clear and clean, strings' vibrato carefully rationed, so that every detail makes its point and the music can be kept constantly moving forward.

So there was nothing unwieldy about this Ninth, no grandeur for grandeur's sake, and in the end celebratory music-making.

Using the edition of the symphony prepared by Jonathan Del Mar with its many clarifications and re-phrasings, Rattle produced some startling changes of perspective, and although he was careful to sound out the depths of the slow movement it was the surges of energy coursing through the first two that typified his powerful account.

It propelled the choral finale too. Willard White launched the Ode To Joy as if he were addressing a revivalist congregation (though with fewer histrionics his singing might have been better tuned), and he was joined by the sweetly lyrical soprano of Ruth Ziesak, fruity mezzo of Yadwiga Rappé and Philip Langridge's ever elegant tenor. The City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus delivered Schiller's words with quite startling fervour.

To provide a reminder that, in Birmingham at least, performances of contemporary music have always been just as important as the staple repertory, the Ninth was prefaced by Harrison Birtwistle's The Triumph Of Time.

Of all British orchestral works of the past 30 years it is the one that has most securely achieved the status of a classic, and the CBSO played it with all the authority it deserves.

This was its fifth proms performance, but it was not the remorselessly grim ritual some conductors have made of it.

Love after the fall

Kasia Boddy

Pleasured
by Philip Hensher
Chatto & Windus 373pp £14.99

PHILIP HENSHER is unlike anyone else writing today. In three novels, in less than five years, a distinctive and consistently appealing voice has emerged.

Pleasured begins on New Year's Eve, 1988, when a car breaks down on an East German road connecting West Germany and West Berlin. Inside the car are an unlikely trio — Peter Picker, an Englishman, and the two strangers to whom he is giving a lift, a student who calls herself Daphne and Friedrich Kaiser (his real name). The novel tracks their intertwined fates in the year that follows. It is, of course, no ordinary year, and it is not only the Berlin Wall that has collapsed by its end.

The breaking down of barriers is, in fact, a constant concern of Hensher's. Love in his novels — and Pleasured, like Other Lulus (1994) and Kitchen Venom (1996) is essentially a love story — is all about letting go and allowing oneself to find consolation in the least likely place. "Do you want?", a character in Pleasured asks another during a sexual encounter. He doesn't know what exactly it is he wants but still he nods. "I just want — ," says another character. Desire finds its object where it can.

Hensher is a firm believer in the significance of coincidences, in moments in which everything changes irrevocably, and in fates that are bound together. His novels are full of mysteries to be uncovered, lies to collapse, and secrets to be dramatically revealed. Pleasured continues an epic strain with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of our personal and political choices. The novel asks how far we are shaped by our familial and national histories, and whether we can, as Picker believes, change history "single-handedly if . . . [we] chose to".



Hensher: a distinctive and appealing voice PHOTOGRAPH: GARY CALTON

The notion of pleasure itself has both personal and political aspects, and the novel — never didactic, always quizzical — gently teases these out. What has pleasure to do with freedom or with power? With money or morality? With responsibility or release? Is it, at root, sexual or chemical? Does it belong to the West or the East? And can we ever have enough?

Most often, however, pleasure seems simply to involve the relief of pain. Daphne experiences the "ecstasy" of political action, while Mario, her East German lover, escapes into the pains and "pleasures of flight" involved in cycle racing. For Friedrich, haunted by his lost father, the oblivion of drink is all he thinks he needs — until, that is, he finds himself dancing tangos on the autobahn and embracing all sorts of new people and possibilities. Picker finds the only source of "undeserved and unmixed" pleasure in his son — the result of a single moment's experimentation with heterosexuality — yet this, too, proves to be precarious. All have sought protection within the enclosed, womblike walls of Berlin, and the pleasures of freedom come at a price.

Hensher's story Dead Language was recently included in A S Byatt's Oxford Book Of The English Short Story, and his wry and polished social comedy might be seen as following in a very English tradition (one that includes Wilde, Coward and Firbank, Pym and Compton-Burnett). On the other hand, Hensher is no "inch of ivory" man. In his continuing exploration of the unpredictable and uneasy alliances that constitute love and politics, as well as his settings — only Kitchen Venom takes place in England — he seems firmly European. But perhaps the closest corollary to the arch grace and moral seriousness of Hensher's writing that one can find is in the American Jane Bowles's modernist tragi-comedy, Two Serious Ladies. Fiction, of any nation, that combines these qualities with such a light touch is rare indeed.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £13 contact CultureShop (see page 29)

Non-fiction paperbacks

Desmond Christy

Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Everest Disaster, by Jon Krakauer (Pan, £6.99)

TRAFFIC jams on Everest? You feel the wind chill even as you read the seven pages of *dramatis personae* in Krakauer's book, a story of bravery and folly, of oxygen and hope running out, of those who paid a fortune to conquer a mountain, not for an icy tomb. Krakauer went up Everest to write an article; he didn't know that he would be coming down with an epic of misadventure that cost eight climbers their lives. This narrative grips you tight and never lets you slip.

Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories From India's Poorest Villages, by P Sainath (Review, £14.99)

THE bitter laughter of the title is heard on most of these pages. The poor are always with us, fortunately — otherwise all that wonderful aid money could not be stolen by contractors, politicians and their friends. Palagummi Sainath shows us how the poor survive and exposes the absurd processes which ensure that they will always be poor. Anyone who has some answers would do well to look at the questions so tellingly put by Sainath.

How To Be More Interesting, by Edward de Bono (Penguin, £7.99)

PITY you if you meet me at a party now that I've become more interesting by doing all the exercises presented here. I was inspired by interesting Mr De Bono's suggestion that "You can become more interesting if you set out to do so. Like riding a bicycle it may seem awkward at first. . . Being an interesting person means that you are more interesting to yourself as well as to others . . . Some boring critic is going to write that this is a boring book on being interesting." I won't.

Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer, by Michael White (Fourth Estate, £8.99)

A BIOGRAPHY that delights in Newton's efforts to find an elixir of life and his scandalous years living with his promiscuous niece. But can Michael White convince us that it was Newton's interest in alchemy that led to his "world-changing discoveries in science"? Professor P M Rattansi of Imperial College concluded that in reconstructing the world of those who founded modern science "we shall have to use categories far more subtle than those of 'scientist', 'magician', or 'sorcerer'. It is all far more complicated than that."

Bernard Shaw, by Michael Holroyd, one-volume definitive edition (Vintage, £9.99)

A SUPERMAN needs a super-biographer, which he certainly found in Holroyd, and a super-reader to get through the three-volume version. The rest of us will relish this more modest volume, a mere 800 pages. "I have trusted to my instinct," writes Holroyd, "while reducing 94 years of Shaw's hectic life, and more than 15 years of my own work, into a form that the general reader can get through in a matter of weeks or days." And wonderful days they are.

Some tears for fears

Chris Petit

Freefall
by Tom Read
Little, Brown 348pp £15.99

TOM Read's account of his adventure soldiering and mental crack-up fits snugly with today's commercial needs: from unreconstituted squaddie masculinity to new-mannishness via nervous breakdown and self-hypnosis. The jacket puff by Read's friend Andy McNab tells the reader exactly how to take it: as a mixture of his own Bravo Two Zero and One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest; and it made him cry. In the face of this, any hostile review can only be seen as knock-kneed and churlish. Still, it is worth asking why — given the SAS's quasi-secret status — so many ex-members blab and end up in the sissy business of writing, given that for the active man reading is regarded as a misfortune reserved for the recovering alcoholic.

After leaving school early, Read joined the Parachute Regiment and developed a passion for jumping out of aeroplanes. Outside ops, SAS life is shown as the usual write-it-in-my-sleep round of Brecon Beacons, Bergens, relentless nicknaming, great bunch of mates, low introspection and poor domesticity (the broken marriage *de rigueur*).

After leaving the army (under not entirely clear circumstances) and while planning a sponsored jump from 26 miles above the Earth — freefalling through space to become the first man to break the sound barrier unaided — he found himself facing the terrors of inner space and went mad, ending up with galloping paranoia and cowering on the sofa with the TV turned up to get him through the "dark nights".

His first breakdown climaxed after almost 200 sleepless hours with the decision that his then girlfriend had to go. Trying to kill her ended with him in a French asylum, and provides a handy start for the book: how did I get here? A successful cut-and-paste flashback assembly makes the book's merits editorial rather than literary or diagnostic.

Several reasons are offered for Read's madness, all dramatic, but the real cause, overlooked by him, might be more banal, and obvious, hinted at by the woman who helped him in his second breakdown. She remarks in passing that Read had spent too long in the army, where everything was done for him. Read understands institutions instinctively and outside their confinements appears bereft.

As a textbook case of paranoid crack-up Freefall has a fascination quite lacking in the accounts of the book's highs — as a general rule, the worse Read gets the better his book.

Sting of the Starkadders

Veronica Horwell

Out of the Woodshed: A Life of Stella Gibbons
by Reggie Oliver
Bloomsbury 272pp £25

"*GAY* Agony by H A Manhood, 7s. 6d . . . This is about a young man called Micah Born in a place called Thrust. There is someone else called Shaphan Ask . . ." No, no: not parody, but a book review Stella Gibbons wrote for The Lady magazine in 1930, in a job she described as a "plum" means of paying her way, even if she did have to publish pieces entitled "Do Women Write Novels?" opposite Mrs C S Peel's article "How to Fry Potatoes".

It is a truth universally acknowledged that it was having to read quantities of fashionable rustic tosh in the process of earning her nine guineas a week that provoked Gibbons to the exorcism of writing Cold Comfort Farm, the masterpiece parody laughed at still long after the bestsellers it mocked are forgotten.

What all CCF fans could have guessed, but not prove until Gibbons's nephew Reggie Oliver researched this perhaps over-quiet biography, is that the power of CCF draws not on literature, but on life. Gibbons borrowed decor and dialect from Mary Webb's Precious Bane and its imitations, as Webb had brewed her pottage of misery from the glummer ingredients of Thomas Hardy's novels. But the Starkadder family were unutterably real. Gibbons's grandfather and father were so rich a mix of hypocrisy, sexual predatoriness and emotional manipulation that the whole Starkadder clan, brooding and breeding near Howling in Sussex, could be created out of them.

Her father, Telford Gibbons, a doctor in the slums of Kentish Town, was a drunken, drugged tyrant who smashed banisters and preyed on servant girls; she wrote in the near-autobiographical novel Enbury Heath a cool account of the attempted suicide by overdose of a governess he had abandoned. For Gibbons was Flora Poste, the rational being who finds it illogical that anyone should choose to have a nasty time when they could have a perfectly nice one. And who considers that yakking on about sex was probably a substitute for some more interesting activity, like embroidery. And who despises those who use victimhood as moral and emotional blackmail.

The sad aspect of CCF is that its exorcism seems to have been too thorough. With it Gibbons freed herself enough from her past to make a peaceable, private marriage which sustained her for the rest of her life; but respectful though Oliver is about her later novels, they lack the clout of CCF.

Africa comes to Ulverton

Nicholas Wroe

Pieces of Light
by Adam Thorpe
Cape 480pp £16.99

FOR Hugh Arkwright, the distinguished theatre director and the protagonist of Adam Thorpe's third novel, the notion that the past is a foreign country is true. Struggling in a disturbed old age to make sense of his family history, it is the letters, diaries and most of all the memories of his childhood in 1920s Africa that continue to exert the most powerful tug on him. Arkwright sees himself as if on a river, "watching a man and his son fishing on the opposite bank", as he dips back into the actual and emotional documentation of his past. As he launches his painful excavations he knows this is his last chance to clarify the confusions of 70 years ago.

Although rooted in colonial Africa, Pieces Of Light is also Adam Thorpe's return to Ulverton, the location and title of his acclaimed debut novel. In that book Thorpe used this speck of rural England as the geographical anchor to a dazzling collection of linked stories spanning hundreds of years and delivered in dozens of different voices. This time the quintessential English environment is initially a compliant counterpoint to the rigours of Hugh's early life. But when Hugh leaves the remote village of Bamakum for school in England, it is the spiritual and environmental similarity between the two places that becomes ever more obvious and Hugh's father's patriotic contention that the soft lawns and bluebell woods of home are "civilisation" seems increasingly untenable.

Up to the age of six, Hugh has been in thrall to his immediate physical and cultural surroundings. Under the influence of Quiri, a 16-year-old family employee, and to the restrained horror of his parents, he develops his own idiosyncratic mixture of traditional and Western patterns of behaviour. Thorpe's *faux naif* narration of these early years haphazardly spills out all the elements of Hugh's early life. The rest of the novel has both him and the reader slowly piecing together the shattered fragments: his adoption of a bag of communion bread as a good luck fetish, the connection between paganism and tins of Lyle's golden syrup, Quiri's fear of dying childless, and the secret tribal mark on the nape of Hugh's neck.

The England he arrives in — "is sacrificed to" — is a bleak and cold country made more sinister by Uncle Edward, whose apocalyptic and mystical pronouncements are, if anything, a more heartless version of the paganism he has supposedly left behind in Africa. After a sad adolescence during which he solitarily acted out Shakespeare plays, Hugh quickly joined up as an anti-aircraft gunner when the second world war broke out. Despite his "ten out of ten" war, he lost the woman he loved — oddly to weird Uncle Edward — before becoming a respected Shakespearean director.

As in Ulverton, Thorpe uses a varied babble of different voices to tell his story, but this time they mostly belong to Hugh Arkwright. There are his childhood memories, written up 30 years after the event, then his diaries as a 70-year-old man, and a long series of imaginary, disjointed and unsettling letters to his dead mother, who disappeared into the jungle a few years after he returned to England. "It's you I'm pursuing mother", he wails at one point, and it is not until we finally see the series of letters she wrote home before Hugh's birth that the mess of fractured childhood reminiscences begin to coalesce.

The long central section where the old man Hugh painfully inches his way back in time is both technically and emotionally the most difficult to read, but ultimately Thorpe's brand of intense poeticism proves well suited to his subject matter. The book's ambitious sweep of anthropology, history, politics, lit-crit and goodness knows what else is meticulously brought together.

While the comparisons on the dust-jacket to Poe and Buchan are not inaccurate — Pieces Of Light is a psychological adventure story — the book also offers more than this. Thorpe subtly takes on the two huge public and historical themes of colonialism and war alongside his affecting and sometimes unbearably poignant human story. He has cast his eye wide as well as deep, and again proved himself astute and inventive as well as a skilled writer.

Gonzoland . . . a cartoon from Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas

Till the ink runs dry

Steve Bell

Gonzo: The Art
by Ralph Steadman
Weidenfeld 208pp £25

WHERE does one begin to talk about an elemental force in world cartooning? In what I presume to be a free-associating and fantastical description of his own birth at the start of this chunky volume, he attributes the words "Gonzo Puro!" to an Italian orderly, Giuseppe Gonzaga, on to whose hand the brand new infant Steadman has just shat.

Ralph Steadman, aged 62, is a Welsh cartoonist. He loves to let things run, especially ink. I've always tended to the constipated approach, cautious, circumspect, conscious of the fact that ink, paper and nibs are expensive and ought not to be wasted. I worry about things like that.

Ralph Steadman is also a worrier, but what he worries is his materials. I once went into Philip Poole's (the only place I know where you can still buy a wide variety of nibs) shortly after Steadman had been in to visit. With hushed reverence, the proprietor showed me where the great man had been trying out new nibs. It was a scene of utter devastation. I felt genuine pity for those nibs.

But what results. There is much in this book that is utterly beautiful, delicious, and splendid. No one else can do the things with ink and imagery that Steadman can. What he depicts is visceral, angry, alienated, squalid, dirty and often deranged, but that's just his style. The effect is sumptuous.

But what is Gonzo? According to Steadman, "the quintessential gonzo image contains everything from wild drug-induced horror to physical violence and excess, while also being funny". Gonzo as we know it stems from his association with the writer Hunter S Thompson, which began when they covered the Kentucky Derby for Scanlan's Monthly magazine in 1970. Steadman drew constantly and without compunction or restraint, to Thompson's mounting horror, the hideous local characters, including Thompson's own relatives, right in front of their own eyes. He has a kind of berserk innocence which fitted perfectly with Thompson's drug-hardened ravings. Their collaboration led to Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas, which turned out to be a massive bestseller.

Steadman now claims to have given up drawing politicians and says he will henceforth show only their legs, since this is more disrespectful. This is clearly claptrap. Still, that's not the point, and politics isn't really the point with Ralph Steadman's work. It's the stuff on the paper; it's shit, but in the very best possible sense of the word.

Superman who fell to earth

Peter Conrad

Herbert von Karajan: A Life in Music
by Richard Osborne
Chatto & Windus 416pp £30

MORE than a psychological enigma, Herbert von Karajan was a metaphysical conundrum. By shaking a stick, he could cause an absolute, immaterial beauty to shimmer in the air. Yet the sonic nirvana he conjured up was contradicted by his devious, devilish temper, and by the sleazy opportunism of his beginnings in the Third Reich. Christa Ludwig revered him as *le bon dieu*, though Elisabeth Schwarzkopf more half-heartedly called him a "demigod". But the impresario Rolf Liebermann denounced Karajan as a malevolent gnome, and John Eliot Gardiner described the hypnotic transmission of will when he conducted as "evil".

Richard Osborne — in his meticulously researched and intellectually thrilling biography — presents Karajan as a schizoid Olympian, alternating between the thunderstorms of Jupiter Tonans and the serene beguilement of Hermes. He was equally at home, of course, in another, more sinister pantheon. This man of the Austrian mountains, a champion skier and a pilot who liked to graze the wings of his plane against the cliffs when coming in to land at St Moritz, possessed the vertiginous sublimity of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, a superman who lives on the heights and vaults over crevasses. Life on the lowlands had fewer charms for Karajan. Shyness was his excuse for a chilly detachment, and he used his glacially blue gaze to zap those who presumed to intimacy. He objected to the erotic fury of Leonie Rysanek's performance in Strauss's Die Frau Ohne Schatten: "Why do you sing the Empress with such heart? She should be cool." Rysanek, unabashed, declined to refrigerate her singing.

Resembling Freud's "prosthetic god" — a man immortalised by machinery — Karajan employed technology to control the world and keep it at bay. He rehearsed operas by playing tapes, which rendered the singers redundant. He even wishfully stood aside from a body which, in his last crippled years, proved to be sadly mortal, studying it as if he had graduated to some more astral plane — the upper atmosphere in which the spheres made music. Thus, in 1983, he insisted that a life-saving operation on his spinal cord should be videotaped. By the time of his death in 1989, he no longer knew where the music came from. Those who heard his last performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony felt, as Osborne testifies, that they were eavesdropping on eternity.

Despite his admiration for the musician, Osborne is properly sceptical about the man. When they first met in 1977, he eyeballed a cantankerous Karajan, threatened to cancel an interview, and promptly earned the wily old despot's respect. Karajan was right to trust him. Osborne deals clemently with the vexed issue of Karajan's membership of the Nazi party, which he attributes to youthful careerism — though as late as the seventies he was posing for record covers in a leather jacket with a bristling quiff of white hair, and he even suggested that an album of Prussian marches should be illustrated with an image of a flaming marble swastika. Someone pointed out to him that marble could not burn; that may have been the point.

OSBORNE brilliantly analyses Karajan's debt to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which — translated into music in Wagner's Tristan Und Isolde — offered "lucidity of spirit" and a reprieve from "the shackles of material things". Yet the Karajan who owned fast cars, motorbikes, yachts, planes and multiple houses, as well as extorting a preferential royalty scale from his record companies, was hardly averse to material loot. His yearning spirituality, as Osborne admits, cohabited with an ugly brutalism. Rehearsing Strauss's Elektra, he told the orchestra that a certain chord should sound like a kick in the chest with hob-nailed boots. When he could not elicit due deference from that salty-tongued dominatrix Birgit Nilsson (her crime was to call him "Herbie"), Karajan retaliated by sneering that Nilsson could play Scarpia — the sadistic police chief in Puccini's Tosca — without needing make-up. It was an inadvertently confessional remark. The composer Gottfried von Einem likened Karajan himself to Scarpia, and explained that he had a gift for voicing hatred in music.

Having turned 50, Karajan wistfully admitted to a friend that "any further development in my life has to come from within, and I am not certain that there is anything within me any more". With consummate delicacy, Osborne shows how wrong Karajan was, and subtly reads his musical performances as a coded autobiography. For Karajan, the emotional frenzy of human life was embodied in Verdi's Il Trovatore, whose archetypal characters, he thought, expressed "fear, hate, love". Most teasingly of all, Osborne interprets Karajan's performances of Ravel's Bolero as a journey through a sensual hell, repetitively indulging an "ultimately ungratifiable demand".

Osborne's book triumphantly justifies its subtitle. Fine as it is on the music, it is even better on the life — and on the ways in which music, with its angelic perfection, derides our aches, pains and fallibilities. He overcomes these scruples: once Karajan's fleet, sporty body begins to betray him, while his enemies — scenting mortality — contribute treacheries of their own, the superman dwindles into everyman, chastened and finally resigned. A Deutsche Grammophon colleague told Osborne that "you had to learn to love Karajan", and conceded that it was an arduous task, requiring a lengthy apprenticeship and much rehearsal. At the end of this long, wise, endearingly funny book, you do feel that the effort of sympathetic comprehension is worthwhile.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £27 and receive a free classical CD by the Naxos Quartet contact CultureShop

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Unnatural selection

Paul Evans

TWO stories to hit the headlines recently make you wonder about our attitudes to wild nature and worry about the limits of conservation thinking.

A fierce debate, with furious letters in the Guardian, followed proposals to control rabbits on the Sussex Downs by gassing them with cyanide. The conservation argument against the rabbits, put forward by the local council and supported by the Wildlife Trust, motto — "Putting wildlife on the map" — was that the rabbit population on the Downs has increased so much that it is damaging important areas for wild flowers through overgrazing.

Rabbit populations are extremely variable and can build up massively with a heavy impact on the plants they graze, only to be decimated by myxomatosis in other years. Trying to control them by gassing seemed a brutal and very short-term solution. It also incensed animal welfare groups. The Downs have seen the ebb and flow of grazing pressure for many centuries and will adjust

The more xenophobic of the ecological chauvinists claimed that rabbits were not native anyway and were the result of human mistakes, which legitimised the means of getting rid of them to protect native wild flowers. Many argued that it was only because the rabbit's predators have been so persecuted that their numbers have expanded unchecked.

Then came a story about a predator which no one seemed to want to encourage. Animal Liberation Front activists broke into a fur farm in the New Forest to liberate thousands of captive mink. Perhaps it was because the mink are non-native predators which seemed complicit in an act of terrorism, but the outpouring of public sympathy for two pigs that escaped from an abattoir earlier this year did not extend to mink. Hundreds of fugitive mink have been rounded up by volunteers, including ironically the RSPCA, and returned to the misery of the fur farm. Farmers and landowners are shooting and trapping as many as they can. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food sent in a hit squad.



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

American mink were brought to Britain for the fur trade in 1929 and began escaping from the word go. It was not until the fifties that they began to breed in the wild, occupying an ecological niche somewhere between polecats, stoats and otters. At that time polecats had been persecuted to near extinction by the game-keeping frenzy of the late 19th century. Stoats, too, were a common sight hanging on barbed-wire fences.

It is estimated that there are more than 100,000 wild mink in Britain, and a similar number suffering in fur farms. The conservation case against mink is that it has almost wiped out the native population of water voles. Though it is true that mink mothers with hungry kits will gobble up all the surrounding water voles, it is not the whole story. Overgrazing and the removal of reedy river edges, grubbing up hedgerows, drainage and flood defence schemes and other development have put paid to water vole habitat. The real villain is not mink but agricultural intensification.

Nature conservation is a cultural project, and however it's dressed up the killing is done for cultural ends. If we are being persuaded to protect the nature we like from the nature we don't, we'd better have more of an open public debate about it than we do at present, and a thorough investigation into the attitudes, prejudices and values that are being bandied about.

Chess Leonard Barden

THE favourites won through at the Smith & Williamson British Championship where Nigel Short claimed his third title, beating Matthew Sadler 1½-½ in a play-off. S & W's £10,000 first prize has brought back the very best players, though Michael Adams, the world No 4 and co-winner in 1997, preferred the US Open in Hawaii.

Short looked in fine form after his recent impressive victory in Estonia. And with Tony Miles a strong third and former champions Jonathan Speelman and Chris Ward next, the result table had a solid look to it.

P Thipsay v C Ward, British Championship Round 11

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6 10 f4 Rc8!? Ward is a world expert on the Sicilian Dragon, and this is the modern choice in place of the older Qc8 or Na5. Now 11 f5? Bd7 favours Black since e5 and e4 are targets, but 11 g4!? is critical.

11 Kh1 a6 12 a4 Na5 13 Bd4 Bxb3 14 cxb3 e6 15 f5 Nc6 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 Be3 Qe7 18 Qd2 Ne5 19 Rad1 Ne8 20 Bg5 Rxf1+ 21 Rxf1 Bf6 22 Bf4 Nf7 23 Bc4 Be5 24 Be3 Nf6 25 Qe2 Kg7 26 Qf3 h5! Safe behind a compact centre and with time pressure approaching, Black goes boldly for a high prize.

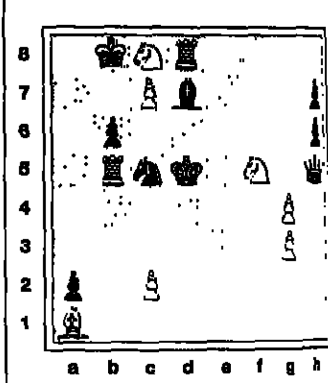
27 h3 g5 28 Bc1 Rh8 29 Ne2 Rh6 30 Qe3 Rg6 31 Nd4 Bxd4 32 Qxd4 Ne5 33 Rd1 Ne8 34 Be2 g4! 35 Bf4 gxh3 36 Bxe5+ dxe5 37 Qxe5+ Qf6 38 Rd7+ Kg8 39 Qb8? White hopes to mate, but is mated. **hxg2+ 40 Kg1 Qf2+! 41 Kxf2 g1Q+ 42 Kf3 Rf6+ 43 Resigns.**

Stephen Giddins had the performance of his life at the Antwerp Lost Boys Open earlier this month. The Kent expert, aged 37, beat two 2500+ opponents and reached his IM norm with a round to spare. This miniature settled first prize:

H Stefansson, Iceland, v J Piket, Netherlands.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 h6 9 Be3 Be7 10 f3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5 12 Kb1 Qa5 13 a3 The Complete Richter-Rauzer by Peter Wells and V Osnos (Batsford, £17.99) is an excellent guide to this opening but only gives 13 Qe3 here. **Rb8 14 f4** Looks artificial after 10 f3, but sets a trap. **b4 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Qxd6 Rb6? 17 axb4 Qxb4 18 Bb5+! Resigns.**

No 2538



White mates in two moves against any defence (by P Hoffmann, 1990). This problem caused havoc in the 1998 world solving championship at St Petersburg and set Britain's Jonathan Mestel en route to losing his world title.

In a competition won by Russia's Georgi Evseev, Mestel finished sixth. Britain were sixth behind Israel, Russia and Ukraine in the team event. How does your solving compare with the champions?

No 2537: 1 e4! with the point a5 2 Kd3 (threat 3 Na6) axb4 3 cxb4 trapping the rook. If 1 . . . Ra5 2 b3 c5 3 Nc6 Ra6 4 c4 Black's R and B are imprisoned while the WR can invade via the d file. The game went 1 . . . b5 2 a5 Bd8 3 Ra1 Rc4 4 Kd3 Be7 5 Na6! Ra4 6 Rxa4 bxa4 7 Nb4 a3 8 bxa3 Bxa3 9 Nxc6 Bc5 10 Kc4 and the passed c pawn won for White.

Quick crossword no. 433

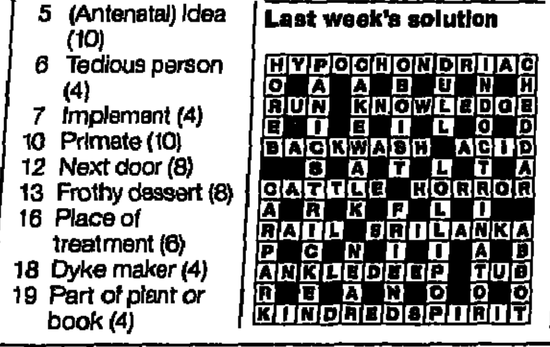
Across

1 Source of rope — or pot (4)
3 Missile of criticism (8)
8 Stick — of sugar? (4)
9 Hypothetical set of events (8)
11 They try to drag out secrets (4,6)
14 Start again (6)
15 Heavy and tasteless (6)
17 Fitted (carpet) (4-2-4)
20 Very cold (8)
21 Culinary or medicinal plant (4)
22 In the open air (8)
23 Attempt (with dagger) (4)

Down

1 Poor stuff done to order (4-4)
2 Totally stupid (8)
4 Collection of facts — (the best!) (6)
5 (Antenatal) idea (10)
6 Tedious person (4)
7 Implement (4)
10 Primate (10)
12 Next door (8)
13 Frothy dessert (8)
16 Place of treatment (6)
18 Dyke maker (4)
19 Part of plant or book (4)

Last week's solution



Bridge Zia Mahmood

AT THE American National Championships in Chicago this summer, Michael Rosenberg and I played a short challenge match against a computer program. I have written previously about "GIB" — Goren in a Box — the brainchild of Professor Matt Ginsberg. The program is far and away the best piece of bridge-playing software around at the moment, and it will shortly become commercially available.

Of course, everyone (especially Matt) was quick to remind me that I'd once bet a million pounds that no computer could beat a top-class human bridge player. At the time, my challenge was completely safe, and even with the advent of GIB I still think that bridge is one sphere in which humans will for ever be able to outplay machines. For example, in a previous encounter I discovered that psychic bids cause havoc with the program.

We played our match over the Internet, thanks to a program called OKBridge developed by Matt Clegg, and it was watched by many spectators sitting at their monitors around the world.

This deal from the match was an interesting one. Love all, dealer South:

North
♠ A 10 9 4
♥ Q
♦ A 9 8 3
♣ J 9 7 6

West
♠ Q 3
♥ J 10 8 7 5 4
♦ 4
♣ Q 8 4 3

East
♠ J 7 6
♥ A K 9 6 3
♦ J 2
♣ A K 5

South
♠ K 8 5 2
♥ 2
♦ K Q 10 7 6 5
♣ 10 2

South	West	North	East
GIB	Rosenberg	GIB	Zia
Pass (1)	3♦ (2)	Pass	3♠ (3)
4♦ (4)	4♥	5♦	Pass (5)
Pass	Pass		

(1) GIB could have opened with a weak two bid in diamonds, but rejected this because it held a side four-card major. (2) Conventionally showing a weak hand with a long major suit. (3) Pass if you have spades, bid four hearts if you have hearts. (4) This may appear brave, even foolhardy, but was in fact based on remorseless silicon logic. If West had a weak hand, and East had a fit for both majors but was prepared to play in only three spades, then North had to have some high cards and some length in diamonds. (5) Since we had at least 6-5 heart fit, I did not expect us to have a trick in hearts, and partner was marked with a weak hand, so I was not confident enough to be able to double GIB's sacrifice.

We could have made four hearts easily, losing just one diamond and two spades, so GIB had outbid us because five diamonds would cost only 300 even if I had doubled. Against this contract, Rosenberg led a heart, which I won to cash the ace and king of clubs. When I played a third round of clubs, GIB made the interesting play of discarding a spade from the South hand. Rosenberg won the queen of clubs and played a fourth round, which I ruffed, so GIB was three down. "Of course," said Michael, "discarding a spade would not cost if I had three clubs or fewer, while if clubs were 5-2 and diamonds 3-0, it would actually gain a trick." I reflected that if diamonds really had been 3-0, we would have been cold for five hearts, and our bidding judgment had thus been insulted by GIB's play. But being an inanimate object, GIB could hardly have meant it personally!

Football Premiership: Charlton 5 Southampton 0

Comeback kids take The Valley by storm

Ron Shillingford

ALAN CURBISHLEY gave his jubilant Charlton players permission "to enjoy the rest of the weekend", which in time-honoured fashion means there were some monumental hangovers the morning after last Saturday's heroics.

And well they might savour this success because Curbishley openly admits that being top of the Premiership table without conceding a goal after two matches is akin to existing in the twilight zone. "We'll soon come back down to earth when we go to places like Highbury," he said.

That harsh reality looms on Saturday, but in the meantime the Addicks can enjoy one of the most improbable, yet wonderfully romantic stories of modern football in Britain.

In their first match at The Valley in the top flight since 1957, Charlton announced their return in emphatic fashion. Who would have expected a 5-0 thrashing of one of last season's most improved sides? Granted, Southampton were a shadow of the team that almost grabbed a European spot last term, and Matthew Le Tissier is not the player of old, but that should not diminish Charlton's outstanding performance, highlighted by the nonchalance of Clive Mendonca's hat-trick.

They may still be favourites for relegation and no doubt will be at the wrong end of the table come May, but Charlton's faithful sufferers, who have seen the club lurch from one financial crisis to another — for a while with no home to call their own as they shared grounds with neighbouring clubs — can at least boast in their old age of the day the Addicks stood atop the Premiership, above the likes of Manchester United, Arsenal and the other Premiership giants.

The phenomenon of relegation certainties usurping the giants is not new. Carlisle United were a spectacular example in the seventies, before crashing down through the divisions. Swansea City have done the same.

Charlton can thank a benevolent Saints side, and an uninspired Newcastle United in their opening game which ended 0-0, for elevation from also-rans to high flyers.

David Jones, the Southampton manager, said: "That was our worst display since I joined the club. I thought we'd got that sort of result out of our system. The players were outraged by the penalty decision. It's a pity they weren't outraged earlier with their defending. I didn't think the sending-off was warranted. I really don't understand that rule."

Charlton were 2-0 up then and well on their way to victory anyway, and even if goalkeeper Paul Jones had not been sent off — for pulling down Mendonca after he had broken through — it is unlikely that the Saints would have found a way back into the match.

Charlton have in John Robinson, Neil Redfearn, Mendonca, Shaun Newton and Richard Rufus players capable of hauling them out of the abyss. Coupled with Curbishley's talent for getting the best out of his squad, it appears they now have the means to ensure survival in the Premiership. Their supporters deserve some credit, too. More than 16,000 packed The Valley last Saturday, and there was no lack of vocal support. They even had the cheek to chant: "We're going to win the League — and now you're gonna believe us!"

Will the bubble burst? It's three months now since Charlton grabbed an élite spot to Sunderland's detriment in one of the most exciting promotion play-off games ever seen at Wembley. If they last for nine more months, nobody will begrudge a side who, not so long ago, were on the verge of extinction.

Golf European Open

IT'S eyeball to ball as Sweden's Mathias Gronberg comes within a stroke of equalling the European Tour's record margin of victory. He finished 10 shots clear in the Smurfit European Open at the K Club, near Dublin.

Most of the Continent's leading players struggled to come to terms with the course, but the 28-year-old Swede took it in his stride, with a 13-under-par total of 295 in the Tour's second-richest tournament.

His victory margin was the best of the season by two shots as a closing 69 gave him his first Tour success since winning the European Masters in 1995 — and prize of more than $340,000. Phillip Price and Miguel Angel Jimenez shared second place.

Cricket

Sri Lanka grab glory

David Hopps at Lord's

FOR World Cup champions, Sri Lanka can look strangely suspect, but their verve is incontestable. England can vouch for that after Sri Lanka took the Emirates Triangular Tournament last week with a five-wicket victory, reversing their earlier defeat on the same ground.

Sri Lanka have been limited by sparse pace-bowling resources and a batting line-up that has hinted at vulnerability against the moving ball. No matter, they prospered anyway, five wickets for the remarkable off-spinner Muthiah Muralitharan and an unbeaten 132 by Marvan Atapattu edging out England in the final with 17 balls to spare.

England's Test stock is at its highest for years, but much agonising remains over the composition of the one-day side to contest the World Cup next summer. At Edgbaston they lost to South Africa (244-7) by 14 runs, but made the final on better net run rate. But here, their 256 for seven was barely adequate.

It required Atapattu's second one-day hundred to guide the champions home. The most conventional of Sri Lanka's batsman, he played nervelessly in the closing overs as two fine catches by Nick Knight gave England a glimmer of hope, with 33 needed off the last six overs.

England's start had been entirely untroubled: Michael Atherton and Knight had an opening stand of 132 in 26 overs. But once this partnership was broken, fears of another England middle-order collapse became a self-fulfilling prophecy. By the time Knight was dismissed (94 off 136 balls) England had lost the chance to set a daunting target to Sri Lanka.

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP:
Aston Villa 3, Middlesbro 1; Charlton 5, Southampton 0; Chelsea 1, Newcastle 1; Derby 0, Wimbledon 0; Leeds 1, Blackburn 0; Leicester 2, Everton 0; Liverpool 0, Arsenal 0, Nottm For 1, Coventry 0; Tottenham 0, Sheff Wed 3; West Ham 0, Man Utd 0.

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE:
Division One:
Bradford C 2, Bolton 2; Bristol City 1, Watford 4; Bury 1, Crewe 0; Crystal Pal 2, Oxford 0; Grimsby 1, Huddersfld 0; Norwich 4, QPR 2; Portsmth 0, Ipswich 0; Port Vale 0, WBA 3; Sheff Utd 0, Birminghm 2; Sunderland 5, Tranmere 0; Wolves 1, Swindon 0.

Division Two:
Bournemth 3, Millwall 0; Burnley 0, York 1; Colchester 0, Fulham 1; Gillingham 0, Bristol R 0; Macclesfld 0, Lincoln 0; Man City 0, Wrexham 0; Northmptn 1, Notts Co 1; Oldham 2, Chesterfld 0; Preston 3, Stoke 4; Reading 3, Luton 0; Wigan 3, Blackpool 0; Wycombe 1, Walsall 2.

Division Three:
Brentford 2, Brighton 0; Carlisle 0, Rochdale 1; Chester 2, Hull 2; Darlington 2, Halifax 2; Hartlepool 1, Sc'thorpe 2; Peterboro 1, Southend 1; Plymouth 2, Barnet 0; Rotherham 2, Cambridge 0; Scarboro 2, Mansfield 3; Swansea 1, Leyton O 1; Torquay 1, Exeter 0.

SCOTTISH LEAGUE

Premier League:
Celtic 2, Dundee U 1; Dundee 0, St Johnstone 1; Hearts 2, Aberdeen 0; Kilmarnk 1, Rangers 3; Motherwell 0, Dunfirmline 0.

First Division:
Airdrie 1, St Mirren 0; Falkirk 1, Hibernian 1; Morton 1, Hamilton 2; Raith 0, Ayr 0; Stranraer 0, Clydebank 2.

Second Division:
Alloa 1, Inverness Cal 1; Arbroath 0, Stirling A 3; Clyde 0, East Fife 0; Livingston 1, Forfar 1; Partick 2, Queen Sth 2.

Third Division:
Berwick 2, Albion 1; Brechin 2, Queens Pk 2; Cowdnbth 2, E Stirling 1; Dumbarton 0, Stenhsmr 2; Ross Co 3, Montrose 1.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Murdoch may be ready to earn his Premiership Spurs

NOT CONTENT with owning the broadcasting rights to top flight English football, Rupert Murdoch is reportedly preparing to join the ranks of multi-millionaires occupying the boardrooms of the Premiership clubs.

Murdoch's News International Corporation has been involved in preliminary talks with Tottenham Hotspur chairman Alan Sugar to buy the ailing north London giant, suffering a renewed crisis on and off the pitch after losing the first two fixtures of the season.

Speculation has been fuelled by the appointment to the Spurs board of Sam Chisholm, former chief executive and managing director of Mr Murdoch's satellite broadcaster BSkyB, which owns the rights to show live Premiership football.

With separate negotiations regarding the formation of a European superleague, which would be bankrolled by satellite broadcasting, still on the agenda, Mr Murdoch's sudden interest in acquiring a high-profile football club would appear to be more than just a coincidence.

Manchester United meanwhile were flexing their own financial muscle, paying Aston Villa $20 million for striker Dwight Yorke — the second most expensive signing in English football history after Alan Shearer's $24 million move from Blackburn Rovers to Newcastle United. Yorke completed his move to Old Trafford in time for his registration and availability for the European Champions League, if United get past the qualification stage.

BEN HOLLIOAKE and John Crawley are back in the England fold for the one-off Test against Sri Lanka at the Oval. Hollioake replaces Andrew Flintoff while in-form Crawley, originally used as cover for Nasser Hussain, lines up alongside him. The full squad is: Stewart, Atherton, Butcher, Cork, Crawley, Fraser, Gough, Hussain, Hick, Hollioake, Mullally, Ramprakash and Salisbury.

ANGUS FRASER is the world's top bowler, according to the Wisden rankings. The Middlesex seamer becomes the first England player to top the table since the list began two years ago, thanks to his haul of 18 wickets in the last two Tests against South Africa. The previous highest England player was Nasser Hussain, who reached third place in the batting rankings last year.

MAX BIAGGI of Italy led from start to finish on his Honda to win the 500cc Czech Grand Prix at Brno and oust Australia's Michael Doohan as the world championship leader. Alex Criville of Spain finished second, followed by Alex Barros of Brazil and the Japanese rider Tadayuki Okada. Doohan went out of contention after sliding off into the gravel on the first lap. He recovered but was then forced to pull out because of a mechanical problem.

MICHELLE MARTIN of Australia won squash's Singapore Open by beating her compatriot and the world No 1 Sarah FitzGerald for the second time in two weeks. The world No 2 recovered after losing the first game to win 9-10, 9-7, 9-4, 9-3 in just over an hour. Earlier this month Martin beat FitzGerald in the Australian Open final.

SOUTH AFRICA'S Kyalami circuit has been pencilled in to host a motor racing Formula One grand prix in 2001. Test runs on the circuit are planned in 1999 and 2000. Kyalami, near Johannesburg, hosted 20 grand prix from 1967 to 1993.

BRITAIN'S Linford Christie is to receive an honorary doctorate from Sheffield Hallam University in November. The athlete will be joined by, among others, Simon Beaufoy, writer of the film Full Monty.

